

# MACABRE CADAVER

*A Magazine of Speculative Fiction, Art and Poetry*



## FICTION:

J.D. McDonnell  
Tom Hamilton  
Dan Shelton  
J. R. Care  
Natalie L. Sin  
Brick Marlin  
Joshua Scribner  
Rick McQuiston  
Gerry Tancreda  
Jason A Lavertue  
Michael A. Kechula

**Issue 2, September 2008**

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## ART:

Adam Gillespie  
Paulina Chu

## POETRY:

Felino Soriano  
Paul Handley  
Sergio Ortiz  
David McLean  
Thomas Zimmerman  
Donna Taylor Burgess  
LeRoy James McKittrick

**SCOTT NICHOLSON INTERVIEW**  
by Emmanuel Paige

**THE BITTER TRUTH**  
Writing: The Journey  
by J. R. Care

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Issue 2, September 2008



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A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to Issue 2, September 2008 of Macabre Cadaver, a monthly online magazine that publishes speculative fiction, art, and poetry. There are a lot of stories and poems in this issue and very little decorative art. It is hard to garner support or artwork on a shoestring budget (or even worse when you work in the "f-r-e-e" publishing realm and can't even offer a bag of peanuts to your contributors). *Sigh!* I try not to lose sight of the ultimate goal, but it is hard sometimes. So, please forgive the haphazard appearance of this issue and the gaudy advertisement schlock. It's a necessary evil. I was behind on time and money and I could barely afford to pay attention (sorry for the pun ... I couldn't resist). We had a lot of submissions and I want to thank each and every one of you for allowing me to publish your contributions of fiction, poetry, art, and non-fiction articles. Please keep them coming. It won't work without you. As always, we look forward to hearing from writers and readers alike. Thank you for visiting Macabre Cadaver. Okay, the commercial is over. Enjoy.

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# CONTENTS

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## FICTION

Scenes from an Accident by Jason A Lavertue .....	7
One Hell of a Day by Dan Shelton .....	9
IMAGINATION by Rick McQuiston .....	12
The Spider by Tom Hamilton .....	15
The Angel Underwater by J.D. McDonnell .....	21
Tales from Coalkeep (part one) Timelessness by J.R. Care .....	29
QWERTY by Michael A. Kechula .....	32
Beyond the Garden by Natalie L. Sin .....	34
Whatch What You Say It Could Burn You! by Gerry Tancreda .....	38
Smiley by Brick Marlin .....	41
Vulnerable by Joshua Scribner .....	43

---

## NON-FICTION

Scott Nicholson Interview by Emmanuel Paige .....	44
The Bitter Truth Writing: The Journey by J.R. Care .....	50

---

## POETRY

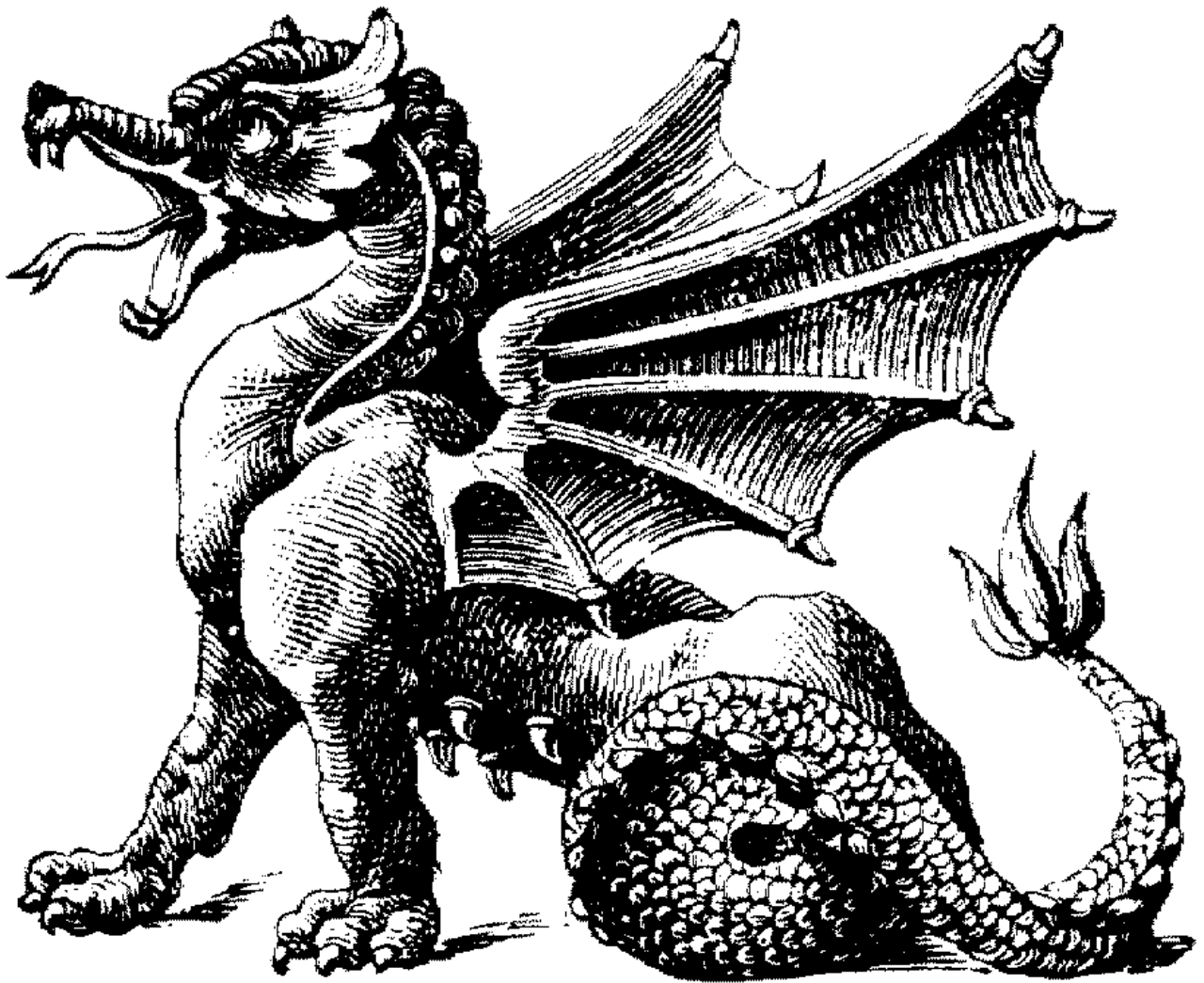
Beyond the Average by Felino Soriano .....	54
Trapped Fortune by Felino Soriano .....	54
Languor by Felino Soriano .....	54
"Secret Name, Sacred Angles, Signed in Blood" by LeRoy James McKittrick .....	55
Flowery Verse by Paul Handley .....	55
Before Darkness/ A Trilogy by Sergio Ortiz .....	56
Breathing Beyond Air by Sergio Ortiz .....	56
Intimate by Sergio Ortiz .....	57
End Song by Donna Taylor Burgess .....	57
And Memories by David McLean .....	58
Mining Abandoned Meanings by David McLean .....	58
Sheath by David McLean .....	58
Ghoulish Attitudes by David McLean .....	59
Alms for the Haunted by Thomas Zimmerman .....	59
The Magician by Thomas Zimmerman .....	60
The Old Amusement Park by Thomas Zimmerman .....	60

---

## ART

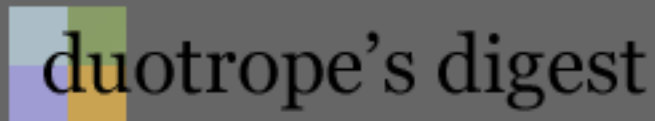
Featured Cover Artist Adam Gillespie .....	62
Signature Ink Drawings by Paulina Chu .....	64





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# Scenes from an Accident

by Jason A Lavertue



JAKE SLOWLY OPENED HIS EYES and focused on the carnage around him. The windshield was spider webbed and smeared with blood. The incessant clicking of the turn signal mated with the drums of pain pounding in his head. Jake drew in a deep breath. The interior of the car reeked of alcohol and automotive fluids. He looked at the passenger seat. Lauren sat slumped over, blood soaked hair covering her face.

"Lauren."

She didn't answer. Her chest heaved with labored breathing.

Jake reached out for her and shockwaves of pain shot through his body.

"Don't worry," a voice said from the backseat. "I can make the pain go away."

Jake tried to turn his head. His body quivered in agony. He scanned the car with just his eyes. They stopped on the skewed rearview mirror. It reflected back the crimson glow of the taillights but no source for the voice he heard.

"Hello," Jake called out.

"Hello, Jake."

Jake craned his neck to look behind him. He fought the pain of thousands of needles piercing his spine. He saw nothing but smashed bottles of beer and shards of vehicle glass. He turned back around to the relative comfort of his original position.

"You here to help me?"

"You could say that," the voice agreed.

"Then help me, God damn it."

"First you have to help me."

Jake looked into the rearview mirror again. Nothing.

"How in the hell am I going to help you?"

Jake coughed, rattling his insides. Blood spewed over his lips and dripped down his chin.

"Nasty internal wounds," the voice commented.

"No shit."

"I have a question for you."

"What is it?" Jake asked.

"Do you love her?"

Jake looked back at Lauren. Her head had shifted, exposing deep wounds on her tender face. His first reaction was disgust. He knew surgery wouldn't be able to repair her to her original, beautiful self.

"If you love her, you'll do what I'm about to ask," the voice suggested.

"What?" Jake asked.

"It's a shame that the poor girl will have to go through life with people whispering as she passes by. She told me she didn't want to live with the scars. She said she'd rather die than go on looking like that."

"You talked to her?" Jake asked.

"Yes," the voice replied. "While you were unconscious, we had a discussion."

"Who are you?"

The voice exhaled like a child thinking of the right lie to tell.

"Let's just say, I am who I am."

"Look, I'm pretty well fucked up here so if you can't help me, then piss off. I'm going to go to sleep until someone comes to help me or I die."

Jake closed his eyes again. His insides burned with pain.

"I can help you."

Jake disregarded the voice. Stars flashed in his mind as his suffering intensified.

"I can make the pain go away, Jake. All I need from you is a little cooperation."

"What do you want me to do?" Jake whimpered.

"Kill, Lauren. Just reach over and strangle her."

"Are you out of your fucking mind?" Jake hollered, sending spasms of numbing pain through his body.

"That's what she wants you know, to die. Look at her. She'll be like the walking dead if she survives. And you know you'll leave her. There's no way you'd stay with her looking like that. She'll be left alone with only her scars to remember you by."

Jake wept. He wept because he knew the voice was right. He was too superficial to stay with someone so badly marred. Their year and a half together would make no difference to him. In the distance, sirens wailed.

"Come on, Jake," the voice implored. "If you wait much longer, you'll miss your chance."

"I can't even if I wanted to; I'm in too much pain."

"Is that your only problem?"

"It's a pretty big problem, asshole."

The voice snickered.

"If I can make the pain cease, will you do it?"

Jake looked at Lauren. It was probably the best thing for her. Her face had swollen, accentuating the deep gouges on her face. Her breathing was shallow. She was as good as dead.

"I don't need to kill her; she's going to die anyway."

The emergency sirens screamed louder.

"Once they arrive, they'll do everything they can to save her. They will save her, and she'll resent you for not doing as she wishes. When you leave her, which you will, your whole life will change. Leaving her will show people that you're as ugly on the inside as she is on the outside. So do as I ask. I will lift your pain, but you must act now."

Jake felt an eerie sensation come over him. It was as if he had stepped outside himself. He was still battered and bloody, but his pain had dulled.

"Do it, Jake."

With tears in his eyes, Jake lifted his arms and placed his hands on Lauren's throat. Her breathing barely registered to his touch. He applied pressure. Lauren's eyes opened, radiating with shock. He released his grip, and the pain rushed back into his body like a shot from a rifle.

"I can't believe you'd kill me," Lauren yelled.

"I told you he would," the voice said.

"No," Jake sobbed. "He said you wanted to die."

The flashing blues and reds of the rescue vehicles flooded the accident scene.

"Hurry up and do it," the voice shouted.

Jake slammed his eyes shut.

"I can't," Jake cried.

"Not you," the voice scolded.

Jake opened his eyes as Lauren thrust a broken bottle into his neck. Blood sprayed from the wound as she removed it. He tried to speak but nothing but gurgles and his final breath came out.

"I told you he'd do it, Lauren," the voice gloated.

"I know," she cried. "I just had to see it for myself. Thank you for your honesty."

"Anytime," the voice said. "Anytime."



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# One Hell of a Day

by Dan Shelton



**S**TUART LOOKED AROUND. He was in an elevator. A large, beige-coloured one. He looked to his left and right, then behind – he guessed there must have been about a hundred people in total, all quietly stood, gazing at nothing in particular, while the lift continued its journey.

But are we going up or down? Stuart wondered. He wasn't quite sure. He was stood near to the front, and he could see the absence of a control panel next to the doors, as one would usually expect, and no display above the doors either, to indicate the direction of travel or their intended destination. But it did feel as though they were descending.

Where the hell am I? he wondered. The last thing he remembered was going to bed, drifting in and out of sleep.

He thought about asking someone else where they were, but the silence of the elevator made him reluctant to disturb it. It would surely become apparent when they reached their destination.

Presently, the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened, revealing a long, thin, plain beige corridor. Two men with clipboards were waiting on either side of the corridor; as the elevator's passengers filed out, they were told to form two queues and give their names.

Stuart joined the cue on the left. He reached the front without much of a delay. From the unhappy-looking clipboard man he was asked, "Name?"

"Stuart Robert McDonald."

His name was checked on the list. "Report to Reception Area 4, desk 47. Along here, then left, then third left, then second right, then left again."

He followed the route given, noting the vast array of corridors and doors which seemed to litter this place – he felt like he was in a huge maze, within which hu-

man directional instinct could be observed, like white lab-coated researchers did with mice. Everywhere was the same uninspiring beige colour. The air was odourless, though a little stuffy. The ground felt warm, even hot in places.

After twenty minutes of walking, and having to double back on himself once for going the wrong way, he finally came to the end of the corridor and a large set of double doors, a sign above which announced he had arrived at Reception Area 4. At last, he thought, and pushed them open.

\* \* \*

He found himself inside an enormous hall; the high ceiling stretched perhaps twenty meters into the air, from which hung an array of fluorescent strips lights, dangling down on long electrical cables and swaying slightly. Their light gave the continued presence of beigeness a bleached appearance.

The hall itself was divided into many smaller segments by the type of temporary walls you find in contemporary offices, and this was exactly what the place reminded Stuart of. Workers walked about, carrying folders and papers, some pushing little trolleys piled high with papers.

A small receptionist's desk was situated to the side of the doors, behind which sat a bored-looking young woman.

"I'm looking for desk 47," Stuart enquired.

She pointed vaguely to the left, "Over there, between desks 46 and 48."

He didn't bother saying thank you.

He eventually arrived at desk 47, which was indeed between 46 and 48. An oldish man sat behind the desk,

an empty visitor's seat in front of it.

Stuart seated himself, the old man behind it greeting him with a half-smile.

The desk between them was a large, wooden beast - old, chipped, but robust and built-to-last. An army of papers, pens, and staplers, cluttered its surface. A large book was sat in front of the man. It was old, thick, leather-bound, its pages crinkled and aged; it reminded Stuart of the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The old man wore a blue cardigan, which was evidentially past its best. The man's countenance was one of weariness, hopelessness. His hair was greying and thin, his skin wrinkled and plagued with liver spots. He peered over the edge of his half-rimmed spectacles and enquired, "Name?"

"Stuart Robert McDonald."

The old man began turning the pages of the book, seeking the name.

"Where am I exactly?" Stuart dared to enquire. "The last thing I remember, I was at home, in bed."

"You," the old man said, looking up from the book, staring at him over the rim of his glasses, "are in Hell."

"Really? So I must be dead, if I'm in Hell?"

The old man nodded. "That's usually how it works," he added wryly.

He returned his attention to the book, turned a few more pages, and stopped.

"You must be Stuart Robert McDonald, 34, of Houston, Texas."

Stuart shook his head. "No."

A look of consternation crossed the old man's face. Earnestly, he asked, "Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Then who are you?"

"I'm Stuart Robert McDonald, 27, of Glasgow, Scotland."

The old man consulted his big book again, glanced up at Stuart, returned his gaze to the book. He flipped to the next page. "A-ha!"

Stuart raised his eyebrows.

The old man tapped the page for emphasis. "You're Stuart Robert McDonald, 27, of Glasgow, Scotland. You're not meant to be dead yet. We've got you mixed up with the other Stuart Robert McDonald from Texas."

"You got me mixed up? That can really happen?"

The old man shrugged. "It's usually just an administrative error. We have a lot of people to deal with, it happens from time to time."

A disbelieving smile broke out on Stuart's face. He chuckled to himself, "An admin error in Hell, how novel." He glanced down at the book. The writing on the page was old, as though done with a quill, and very ornate. "That page is about me, right? Can I see, when do I really die, why am I here? - I always thought I'd led a good life and would end up, you know..." He pointed skyward.

"Most people think that," the old man said wearily. "People are more evil than they think."

"So when do I really die?"

The old man shook his head. "I'm sorry, it's more than my job's worth to tell you - though technically, I am stuck here doing this for eternity, so..."

"Please."

The old man considered a moment, finally deciding. "No, I can't disclose that. But I can tell you -" and he smiled at delivering this news - "that you've been assigned to the work detail in the furnaces."

"Furnaces?"

"This place needs a lot of hellfire to keep going."

Stuart didn't like the sound of that. He crossed his arms, his mood turning sour.

"We can rectify the mistake and return you to earth," the old man informed Stuart. "You'll just need to fill in a few forms first." He fished out a form from one of his desk drawers, handed it to Stuart, and told him to fill it in and take it to Administration Room 14, desk 8.

\* \* \*

After the mandatory form filling and checking of details, he was sent to a small waiting room (the Repatriation Area they called it) where he awaited his return to the land of the living. He wondered to himself, how had he ended up in Hell. Have I not always tried to be virtuous and good? he thought. Am I not kind and sincere, a good person?

Sure, I have bad days, I lie sometimes, I can be a bit nasty - but everyone is like that! No person is an angel. We're just human, that's all we can be, he concluded.

His thoughts were interrupted when a woman entered the room and beckoned him to follow her. Presently they arrived at the return elevator.

\* \* \*

He awoke in his own bed. He looked about at the familiar surroundings of his bedroom.

I'm back from hell, he thought triumphantly. I'm alive!

\* \* \*

Two days later, he stepped out in front of a truck and was killed.

An hour afterwards, he found himself again in the familiar but unwelcome surroundings of beige blandness. A familiar old man looked up from his desk. "Welcome back. Ready to start your new job?"



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# IMAGINATION

by Rick McQuiston



**T**HE SHADOW DANCED OFF THE FAR WALL. Its movements were natural, like a tree branch swaying in the wind, but still unsettling nonetheless. And unlike a branch in the wind these movements suggested life.

Ricky rubbed his sore eyes, as much to confirm that what he was seeing was real as to clear his head. Beads of cold sweat trickled down his forehead and into his eyes. The slight stinging sensation bothered him a little, but not enough to take his eyes off of the shadow. It was a strange thing that demanded his attention.

“W . . . who’s there?” he called out to the darkness. “What do you want?”

He knew perfectly well that whatever was lurking in his room would not answer him. It probably couldn’t even understand his words.

Strange, unrelated thoughts raced across his mind, hindering his ability to focus on the dire situation he was in. His grandmother came into view in his head,

her multi-colored apron flapping in the gentle breeze as she held out a dish stacked high with freshly baked cookies.

“Ricky dear, look, I’ve made some sweets for you.”

He could practically still smell the chocolate chips.

Another vague memory of his grandmother filtered into his mind.

“Ricky dear, please help your old grandma. I need my teeth. They’re in the glass in the bathroom.”

Ricky shuddered when he thought about those nasty old teeth moldering away in their cleaning solution. How she put those things into her mouth he could never figure out.

“Ricky, are you there?”

The words weren’t coming from some old memory he was reliving. These were coming from his room,

from the shadow by the far wall.

“Ricky dear! Where are you boy?”

He swallowed hard and reached over to switch his lamp on. Predictably, nothing happened.

“Ricky?”

Feeling the need to arm himself, he began to search around the room for anything he could use as a weapon, finally settling for his old baseball bat.

The shadow was now emitting a low, nearly inaudible growl, which resonated off of the walls. Pictures rattled. A small glass fell to the ground. The light fixture above his bed swung back and forth.

“Ricky dear, help your old grandma.”

A brief pause.

“Ricky dear, your old grandma misplaced her teeth again. Would you help me find them?”

Something shuffled in the darkness. Whatever it was it was having difficulty moving, struggling to gain control.

“Ricky! I know you’re there! Just stay put and your old grandma will be right there.”

Ricky closed his eyes and tightened his grip on the bat, trying desperately to hold on to the memories of his grandmother. In his mind his grandmother read bedtime stories to him. She baked him fresh chocolate chip cookies and played all of his favorite games with him, often letting him win. She did all of the typical things a loving grandmother did with her one and only grandson, including being there for him when his parents weren’t.

But this wasn’t his grandma. This thing that was slithering towards him in the supposed sanctuary of his bedroom on this chilly, crystal clear autumn night was not even human . . . at least not anymore.

“I’m coming Ricky dear,” the thing drawled. “You



just wait there for me . . . you hear me boy? You just wait for me.”

Ricky began to impulsively play with his hair as he tried with all of his might to look away from the nightmare coming towards him. Should he call out to his parents for help? The overwhelming urge to do so was hard to resist, especially considering the situation he was in, but his desire to prove that he wasn't a baby anymore to his strict and overbearing parents was also strong.

“Ricky dear, I'm coming. I'm almost there!”

“Mom! Dad! Help me! Mom? Dad?”

But the familiar sound of footsteps galloping down the hallway towards his room was alarmingly absent. Only the wet thuds of the thing approaching his bed filled the dark room. It slithered nearer and nearer to the bed, leaving a foul smelling residue in its wake. Ricky thanked Heaven that it was mostly hidden by the darkness.

“Ricky, I'm almost there.” The words were followed by heavy grunting and slobbering. “And don't worry dear, your old grandma found her teeth this time. She's got them right where they belong . . . in my mouth!”

Ricky, spurred on by his instinct to survive, leaped out of his bed, and gripping the bat tightly in his sweaty hands, straightened up in front of the thing approaching.

More grunting and slobbering.

“Ricky dear, don't you want to see your old grandma?” The tone of the words had changed slightly, gravitating towards an elderly woman who was merely happy to see her grandson. It was still hidden by the darkness, only occasionally poking out a limb here or there, as if to stimulate its victim's imagination. It wanted Ricky to think about what it might look like, just what it might actually be.

Despite his fear Ricky found himself fascinated by the scenario unfolding before him. His imagination was running wild with possible explanations, each one trying to grasp plausible reasons for the horrible anomaly. He'd always had a strong and vivid imagination, it helped him to cope with the hardships in his life. His struggles in school, his general rejection from girls, the terrible voices that occasionally filled his head and . . . the death of his grandmother.

“Mom! Dad!”

Again no response.

The withered, bloodless hand of his dead grand-

mother slammed onto the floor, followed immediately by the other hand, revealing them from the darkness.

“Ricky dear, I'm right here. Your imagination has helped me so much. I'm coming. I'm coming.”

Feeling the need for a better weapon, Ricky scanned the room for anything he could use. He wanted something bigger, something that wouldn't require him to get too close if he had to.

“Ricky? Ricky?”

Ricky jumped out of his bed and raced to the door, swinging it open in one swift motion. He suddenly remembered where he had left it, on the floor near the bathroom door, and if he could get to it in time it would prove to be just the ticket he needed.

To his great relief it was right where he had left it.

“Ricky, where'd you go?”

In a flash he was back in his bed brandishing his new weapon, reveling in the confidence it gave him.

The sunken corpse face emerged from the darkness. It was his grandmother, but not the one who used to bake him fresh chocolate chip cookies or let him win in his favorite games. The face belonged in a cemetery, a horrific painting of death, fully intent on its foul purpose.

Ricky tightened his grip on the shovel as graveyard dirt cascaded down onto his bed. When he had exhumed his grandmother's remains the night before and brought them to the house he had no idea that his overactive imagination would go into overdrive like it did. He had only wanted her to be home again, to complete the family, just like it was before she had died. His parents were for the idea as well. Their bodies, which were decomposing in their bedroom, had told him so.

“Ricky? Ricky?”

His grandmother looked directly at him, her glassy eyes dripping down her gaunt face. He tried to look away but couldn't. It was the price he had to pay for his actions, even though he did what he did for love.

But if it came to it would he have the strength to hit his own grandmother with a shovel? Could he bring himself to attack the very one he was trying so hard to bring back?

“There you are dear. Grandma's coming.”

The carcass slithered up to the bed with remarkable agility, considering it had been under six feet of cold, hard dirt just a short while ago, and glared at Ricky with a stare of evil beyond comprehension. Ricky stared back, clinging to the thin belief that there was

---

still a shred of humanity left in it, although he knew perfectly well there wasn't.

"G . . . Grandma? Is . . . is it really you?" The words stumbled out of his mouth, and he realized just how foolish they were. Of course it was his grandma. The tombstone had her name clearly etched on it. Plus he had recalled exactly where she had been buried. He remembered the funeral well.

Almost without thought he swung the shovel high over his head and slammed it down with all of his might onto his grandmother's rotting head. A sound like a ripe watermelon hitting concrete filled the room, followed immediately by a terrible stench, which clogged his senses with nausea. The corpse collapsed into an unrecognizable mass of decayed flesh. The shovel dropped to the floor as Ricky fell back into his bed, his mind racing with the implications of his actions.

Should he call the police? Would they believe him? How could he sleep with the dead body of his grandmother in his bedroom? Did he remember to turn the coffee pot off? Was ketchup on sale this week at the grocery store? And if it wasn't where could he get a good deal on some? He definitely needed some more ketchup.

He laid down on his bed, pulled the covers up to his chin and began to play with his hair. The silk trim on his blanket provided much needed comfort, just as it always had when he was a little kid, especially when he had to go to the doctors office and get his medication. How he hated that place with all those nasty tests and needles.

He glanced over at the nightstand next to his bed. The small piece of paper with his doctor's messy signature scrawled on it reminded him that he had forgotten

to get his prescription filled again. Not a problem though, he'd just have to remember to give it to his mom and she would take care of it like she always did.

"Mom?" he called out to the darkness. "Mom? I need my prescription filled. Mom?"

No response.

"Mom?"

Still no answer.

He looked across the room and was surprised to see the corpse of his grandmother. She was on her back and was completely intact. A thin layer of dirt covered

most of her body and clogged her hair. Next to her was a small shovel, his shovel, which also had dirt on it.

"Mom? Dad? Grandma's still here. She's in my bedroom. Mom? Dad?"

The anxiety that he felt when he heard the familiar footsteps walking down the hallway towards his room was immense. But the fear that he felt when his bedroom door swung open was far, far worse.

Bio:

Rick McQuiston is a forty year-old father of two who loves to read, write, play drums and paint. He's had over 150 publications so far and recently finished his third anthology book, "Beaneath the Monnlight", which is available on Lulu.com. He is also a guest author each year at Memphis Junior High School and editor of a horror ezine, [www.geocities.com/many\\_mid-nights](http://www.geocities.com/many_mid-nights)



# The Spider

by Tom Hamilton



**B**EN ALMOST TRIPPED OVER her as he stepped off of the ramp and on to the concrete: a white child with garden green eyes and skin pale as the piece of chalk she was holding in her hand. She had created several crude drawings on the walkway. Even though it was almost dusk, Ben could still make out that most of the crooked etchings were of bugs. Albeit the prototypical preschool rendition.

When he tried to walk around her she stood up suddenly, blocking his path. She was under four feet tall and her brown hair was as tangled as leafless briars. Her features came into the limited light and now Ben could see the purple scabs on her face and arms. She was holding up a small chalkboard where she had formed an imperfect circle on the green blackness. This was attached to a smaller imperfect circle with eight crooked lines scrawled out from the body. She began to speak, in a lifeless yet singsong tone.

"Will you walk into my parlor said the spider to the fly." She said, "Tis the prettiest little parlor that you ever did spy." She paused to curtsy. Showing off her tattered and element smeared dress. Momentarily taken aback by this strange recitation, Ben could only stare. Before he abruptly snapped out of his trance and walked away.

During his last few hours of dealing he had begun to feel nauseated. He had thought this unusual since he had not experienced any sea sickness in over two and a half years on the job. Now though, as he strode away from the peculiar kid, his stomach felt as if it were full of blood or rotten vegetables. He walked out onto the pier before leaning over the railing and violently vomiting into his own reflection. Afterward, he drew in a few chopped breathes, removed a handkerchief from

his suit pocket and mopped his mouth. When he had composed himself, he looked back in the direction of the ragged child. But he did not see her. Nor were there any chalk designs visible on the cracked walkway.

\* \* \*

"You don't know Eric Ned," Vanessa said. "His methods are so vicious... he just sucks the life out of anyone who goes against him."

"Yeah well," Ben began, "He doesn't know me either." His outstanding self was still inside of her and it still felt damn sensational even though they were finished.

"You mean you work at the casino boat?" She asked. "And you haven't heard about him? Haven't... heard him called by that awful name."

"Sounds like you're proud of the ruthless bastard." He said while stroking her long black hair; pasting the strands to her alabaster cheek.

"No," She said softly. And now he could see the trepidation tinged with fear crossing over her dark, and now even darker brown eyes. Like a winter cloud blocking out an eclipse. "I hate him."

"Well then what did you marry the prick for then?"

"It wasn't by choice I assure you. It was more like... being trapped in a web."

"What the fu..." He guffawed while slipping out of her. Soft now, he clambered off the bed. "Are you kidding' me? They call the guy the spider and you were trapped in his web?"

She didn't answer, but only stared at him obviously wounded. Her gas cap sized nipples and mocha hued irises alluring in the strained motionless light. She

tiredly lit up a cigarette and exhaled while still looking sad. The smoke disappeared into the whipped white drywall of his small apartment. Her lips were thick and soft like an orchid and wanted her all over again and maybe... all to himself.

Vanessa lowered her delicate head. like a flower drooping, and bit down nervously onto her painted and manicured nail. He walked over to the window, suddenly feeling sorry about spouting off carelessly with his insensitive wisecracks. He pulled on a robe as he looked out over the restless configurations of the tainted city.

"Why don't we take a run on down to the coast," He offered. "Get outta this rat hole for a few days."

"Are you crazy," She asked as she gathered the sheets up, covering her vivacious body. As if she were afraid that Eric Ned may be watching them, right here, right now. "Do you have any idea what he would do to us if he found out?"

"Oh he might find out," Ben said as he walked over to a chest of drawers; the designs of flowers expertly carved into the handsome piece. He slid open the center compartment and pulled his choicest firearm: a mutant pakistani desert eagle which he always kept at arm's length beside the bed. "He might find out he's not dealin' with no punk this time."

\* \* \*

"Take the parkway until you can see the old Cooper Road warehouses." Ben could still hear Vanessa's voice whispering the directions into his brain. "Once you're underneath the bridge turn back south. When the water comes into view you're almost there." "Thank God for that." Ben thought as he drove under the concrete girders. Past dilapidated tenement buildings and empty eyed factories, pigeon perched row houses and shanty shacks with bird shit stained metal roofs. Then finally by an old world war two barracks which was now being used to house non-satiated minorities and new American Mexicans. A birthday cake purple had been slathered on over the long slats of formerly army green, wooden siding. Dark sketches of poverty flattened figures sat under the caged frames of unpainted porches and watched him roll past.

"When you get down almost to the strand you'll see a sign which says: 'MASSAGE' The moniker glowed

yellow just as his lover had described. It was pale and discolored from weathering like a jaundice face in the peaked fog. "Most nights, he's in the very back of the building. Just his presence there terrifies the girls. With him looming over them, you can bet they'll satisfy any whim, no matter how perverted, that his customers may request and that's the way he likes it. He keeps the business running very smoothly."

He parked in a gravel lot three blocks down, pausing to feed a cartridge into the butt of the eagle. "Be careful Ben," The memory of Vanessa's voice warned before signing off. "You have no idea how dangerous that monster is."

The massage parlor was an old black bricked three story. With the year of its construction { 1890 } dedicated as an inscription within a sideways rectangle of greened concrete near its crown. Looking at it from the street it appeared that only the first floor was in use. The windows on subsequent stories were either blacked out with dull paints or covered over by impenetrable curtains and slashed fragments of bright contact paper. In a lower front window, a brighter sign seemed to shout: 'BIKINI MODELS'

With the eagle riding on his hip underneath a leather jacket, Ben brashly walked through the front entrance. A long rope with jingling bells was tied to the door and it rudely sounded off. This made Ben crouch with his hand on the weapon, but as his eyes adjusted to the pale light, he saw that there was no one in the room to be alerted by this chime: only a small wood grained desk sitting off to one side; which was adjacent to a row of headless white mannequins, samples of lacy lingerie stapled to their partial bodies.

There was a hallway in the center of the room, its entrance shrouded by a purple curtain with gold trim. Ben took a few cautious steps and pushed the drapes aside, revealing a long darkened hallway. Scores of rooms lined the corridor on both sides. At the very end, there was a cubicle facing Ben which the hallway led into. Inside that chamber there was a blonde woman propped up on a half couch, sort of half sitting or half standing. She wore only a one piece bathing suit which was black with old gold piping. Her skin was as pale as paper and her eyes were glossed over as if she were drugged. She was gyrating in a slow rhythmic motion as if she were performing some sort of seductive number. Yet, there was no one else in the room with her.



That's when Ben noticed that she was not dancing of her own volition and that her arms were weakened and limp. There were wires attached to her limbs like those which control a marionette. But no... those were not wires. These gossamer strands were thinner, more numerous like... spider silk.

Ben was about to take a step closer when he heard someone behind him brush aside the curtain.

"Hey mon, you not supposed to be bayck here."

Startled by the voice Ben spun around, but all he could make out in the gloomy hallway was the dim outline of the speaker. The voice spoke again, calm and accommodating, in what Ben supposed was a Jamaican accent.

"It's okay mon. Is it a girl you be needin'? We got plenty a those."

The figure retreated through the curtain and back to the small reception room, gesturing for Ben to follow. Before Ben left he glanced in the direction of the blonde woman's room, but by now, the door was shut.

In the better light of the reception room Ben focused on a muscular black man; he was perhaps six two, six three and wore tight braids woven back into clips. They were mostly covered over by a yellow, red and green Rastafarian flag bandana which matched the loose fitting banana colored shirt he wore. It was open in the front exposing a granite abdomen, and, although the man was acting friendly, Ben was still glad that he had the eagle handy.

"You want I call the girls out mon? You need a back rub aye?" The Jamaican queried.

Ben shook his head no. "I'm looking for Eric Ned?" He said harshly, his mouth a line.

"OOOOHHHH!" The Jamaican cooed through a wide smile. "Then you be Ben."

Ben blanched in spite of his bravado. "How do you know who I am?" He asked.

"Oh not me," The Jamaican began while smiling his biggest smile yet. "But d boss mon, he know."

"Yeah, what does he know?" Ben asked obviously disgruntled.

"He knows you been bangin' his old lady mon. That shit be good."

Ben said nothing, but only stared at the grinning islander. Since the woman in question wasn't exactly his wife, he couldn't decide whether to take the bawdy comment as a compliment or an insult. The Jamaican

broke the silence for him: "You be dead man Ben." He said flatly, his grin vanishing.

"Yeah," Ben shot back. "How do you know I won't kill your boss first?"

The Jamaican shrugged. "You can try," He said. "Many mon try, many mon die." He walked behind the desk before continuing. "He come from down south mon, way down south. Below d e-quater. They not just call him d spider mon, he be d spider, cunning, ruthless. He suck your blood out mon."

"Yeah," Ben acted like he wasn't intimidated. "Where is this bad ass?"

"Oh he not here now mon, thank God. He out to d house. You know where that is don't you?" The Jamaican smiled cleverly, like someone in on a secret. Although what Ben and Vanessa had been doing was obviously no longer in confidence. Vanessa. Her perfume soaked his thoughts as he pictured the house, which could easily be called a mansion. But he chopped her sweetness from his mind. He had to keep focused on the murderous task at hand.

"Yeah," Ben stated without wit. "I know where it is."

"Yeah," The Jamaican's eyes darkened. "Well don't go there mon. If you do, I think he kill you mon, I think you die. Nothing personal."

Ben suddenly pulled out the eagle and stuck it in the black mans face. Although he had came here to kill Eric Ned, now he just felt that the eagle needed its own measure of satisfaction; as if just firing the gun would solve all of his problems. For a suicidal second, and Ben couldn't even figure out why, he thought about turning the eagle on himself. One thundering bang and then peace and silence.

"You can die too you know," He spat at the host. "How do you know I just won't waste you? Nothing personal."

The Jamaican put his hands up, like someone skimming their fingertips across waist deep water. But his demeanor held calm, like a tropical breeze had fluttered through the building.

"Easy mon," He said. "You can kill me, that much be true. But I not the one who wish you any harm mon. And killin' me won't stop d spider from killin' you. And it won't change what he going to do to his old lady mon."

Ben lowered the barrel. "What do you mean?" He

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asked. "What is he going to do to her?"

"You better go now mon." The Jamaican surmised. "If I were you... I hit the highway. They be other women, other times. Less you go out to dat house mon. Then there'll only b you and d spider."

\* \* \*

On the drive over Ben thought about how good things could be once it was all over. He had felt very lucky to be working as a blackjack dealer out to the casino boat. For he once been a very adept and deft burglar, a career which had landed him on an island prison. But those nightmares were over and with his gaming experience he figured maybe Vanessa and he would land out to Vegas afterward. Perhaps those credentials would net him a job tossing the cards out there. If indeed Vanessa were even still alive.

He hated to think of her in the past tense, but even if she were dead, he still felt that he owed Eric Ned a visit; that he should put a bullet through Eric Ned's spine on principle alone. And it didn't really have anything to do with avenging Vanessa's death. Ben had never backed down from a confrontation in his life. It was the only way he'd managed to survive reform school: He had purposefully escalated his every conflict into a violent and blood lashed conclusion.

Ben tried to think of an another way into the house. He didn't want to make it easy for this prick. After what the Jamaican had said, Eric Ned should be waiting for him, crouched behind any and every corner ready to blast him.

The house was a virtual mansion and as Ben licked the salt from his lips, he recalled what Vanessa had tasted like in the bedroom/hot-tub/pool/shower. He could almost feel her smooth brown legs wrapped around his waist, see the sparkly glimmer off of her shining teeth. Yet once again, he pushed her comely image from his mind, at least until Eric Ned was disposed of.

As he crept through the grass, which was gleaming with dew in the humid, mosquito infested back yard, he almost stumbled over a bird bath in the darkness. At its center was a grotesque statue of a gigantic spider, its eight furry legs enveloping a man. Water streamed from two plaster pinchers to cascade down over the depicted victims throat. The spot where the venom would be injected had this been an actual scenario. Ben

sighed and fingered the eagle for the twentieth time. "This mother fucker takes himself pretty seriously." He explained to himself.

At the rear of the lavish home he knew from past visits of a sliding glass door. Upon closer inspection he discovered that there was no wooden plank holding it in place. He easily forced the door to jump its track and stealthily entered. As he crossed the threshold he tried to shake off the feeling that a bullet was going to explode into his chest at any instant.

Inside the house the living room was dark and quiet. All Ben could make out were the crude outlines of expensive furniture. He drew the eagle, ready to let it obliterate the first and faintest hint of movement detected. He kneeled behind a lounge while trying to let his eyes adjust to the gloom. Once they did, and he could see that he was still alone, he moved towards the familiar banister in the next room over. He approached it cautiously, pausing to crouch underneath the archway like a battle hardened soldier. Once he reached his goal, he found himself staring up the spiral stairway.

But before he could toe the first step he found himself exposed in a blinding floodlight. Almost as quickly, the body of a flying mass blotted out his vision. He leveled the eagle at his brow and fed the white blur three slugs before one heartbeat had elapsed. He covered his head and closed his eyes, bracing for a collision with the hurtling wraith.

When he felt no impact within a couple of seconds however, he reopened his eyes. A crumpled form lay on the marble floor within the litter of his spent cartridges. It was a tiny body, not much bigger than a small roadkill. Upon closer inspection Ben recognized the ruptured figure of the ragged child from the docks. Her dress had further deteriorated until it wasn't much more than a tattered towel. Her face was so white it looked as if it had been spray painted. Even the scabs on her face and arms no longer held any color. Ben fought back a pang of guilt and tried to tell himself that the little girl had been long dead even before she met with his bullets. Her appearance seemed to support this theory: nothing that bleached could have still been alive.

He cursed himself. How could he have panicked so severely and given away his position? Now anyone who was inside the house would know exactly where he was. Attempting to change this environment he hast-

ily retreated then veered off into a sleekly designed, steely kitchen. He huddled below the sink for several seconds and thought about the little girl: had Eric Ned sent her to the casino boat to spy on him? No, she was much too small to instruct, and why would he send a child on such a mission? Now the bastard must have killed her.

He listened for the sound of footfalls or perhaps a cocking gun. When he heard nothing he crept back to the foot of the winding stair and quickly ascended to the second floor. It was time to waste this asshole and get the hell out of here.

He knew where Eric Ned's study was located: down a small hall adjacent to the pinnacle of the banister. It was the one room in the house which Vanessa had always avoided. A long thin window ran all the way up the side of the door. Once he got about ten feet from it; he could see that there was a light on inside.

As he slowly approached he could see Vanessa standing towards the rear of the room. Her head was moving slightly to and fro as if she were talking and he was relieved to see that she were still alive. He angled over until his left shoulder was pressed against the wall in an effort to see who it was she may be speaking to, yet, he could see no one else in the room.

Not even bothering to try the knob, Ben pulled the eagle and kicked the door open. As soon as it swung inward the lights went out; as if opening the door or crossing the threshold tripped some sort of dousing mechanism. Ben felt something soft brush against his hand, faint, like the hint of cobwebs on your ears in a spring wind. And just as lightly, impossibly, his desert eagle was lost from his grasp.

A spotlight came on suddenly, illuminating one ill lit corner of the room. Vanessa's face was inside the glowing circle; it was as white as a marble statue. A long slobbery drop of dried blood was dripping from the corner of her transparent lips. Her body was wrapped in what looked to be millions of strands of piano wire. She did not appear to be conscious or alive at all. Ben tried to take a step towards her, but he found that his ankles were bogged down; as if he were trying to kick through an ankle deep swamp. That's when he noticed a long black saber descending from the ceiling. Its paper sharp tip puncturing out a fresh drop of blood near Vanessa's nose; what little blood that is, which was left inside her ravaged form.

Ben crouched and groped for the eagle on the floor. but it was like reaching into a vermin infested crate inside an old barn: webs whispering up against his hand, causing his wrist to itch. The long sword began swinging back and forth, similar but not identical to the motion of a pendulum. It effortlessly spun his lover's head around on her broken neck until her once flawless throat was twisted into a ghastly hard taffy twirl. And for the first time Ben could see that the saber had long tufts of hair sticking out from its surface; and that it wasn't a saber at all but part of a larger apparatus which bent sharply to a point near the ceiling. He realized then that he was looking at the spindly leg of a gigantic creature which was hanging up side down in the darkness of the rafters. When he tried to run his legs could not move at all. Sharp wires were tightening around his thighs and the more he struggled, the more ensnared in the mesh he became.

"Hello Ben."

A voice addressed him from somewhere above. Perhaps in the vicinity of the creature but more like it was coming from a speaker or a speaker phone. He tried to move out again but found himself even more bound then before. The leg continued to jab at Vanessa's destroyed head.

"I heard that you were looking for me." The voice continued as Ben slumped to the ground and now he could see what was holding him up: he was trapped in the swirls of a silken funnel; a gigantic web encompassing the entire room, except that, there really didn't seem to be a room anymore. A breeze whipped across his face and the sunlight tried to struggle through his grey prison. When he looked at his hands they were green and thin; hooked to claws and attached backward like an insect's.

"Well," Eric Ned began, "I don't want you to think that I'm an ungracious or unwelcoming host." Now Ben could see the other legs, slicing the air as the spider dropped down, scuttling until its grotesque form was right side up. The web shook as one of the sharp limbs shaved Vanessa's head uncleanly off. Her detached skull did not fall; but only hung there, the strands of her long hair clinging to the once invisible web.

"But I heard that you were looking for me and that you and my sweet, sweet Vanessa were going to fly." Ben pissed himself and the urine beaded up on the web like rain water. "And there's only one expression, or

rather, one line of poetry that I've ever pitched to a fly:" Now Ben could see the head emerging from the tunnel. It was as big as a basketball, with the bag or the venom sack of the spider's body attached. It was as big as a Volkswagon. The web began to vibrate, like a bridge in high wind, as the monster trampled across it. Eric Ned's red eyes shown in the darkness like an exit sign inside an X-rated theatre. Then the eyes were six inches from his face and he could see his own reflection in them as if he were inside a bright Christmas ornament. Furry pinchers throbbed against his sweaty neck; right up against the jugular. Two bullets exploded through his spine as the venom worked its paralysis. Ben's soul exploded from his mind and his gravity heavy body slumped to the floor Eric Ned said, "Welcome to my parlor."

**Bio:** Tom Hamilton is an Irish Traveler. His work has appeared in over one hundred publications around the world. Including the Rockford Review, Red Wheelbarrow Literary Journal and Sinister City among many others. He has two poetry chapbooks published. 'The Rain Draw Bridge' from 'Alpha Beat Press' and 'The Last Days of My Teeth' from 'Budget Press' His short story 'The Spider' is available as an E-book from 'Curious Volumes Publishing' Along with his wife Mary Theresa and their three small daughters, Tiffany, Hope and Catalina, he lives in Rockford IL USA.



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# The Angel Underwater

by J.D. McDonnell



**H**E LOOKED AT THE PHOTO one last time. This would be the ninth or tenth one last time he would look at it today. The photo was of a man who once took peculiar delight in stepping on people only to eventually be stepped on himself. Normally this was nothing out of the ordinary, but what struck Times-Picayune reporter Samuel James Ponticliiff as strange was the way in which he had been stepped on, which was to say that the man in the photo had literally been stepped on, and stepped on by something big.

The man in the photo was Jefferson James Lalleman, aka the Lullaby man, a gangster who took his fashion sense from the silver screen and left everything else behind. No celluloid heart of gold beat beneath his fine silk vests. He was cold, and at one time it seemed as if every other corpse pulled out of the river bore his signet ring stamped on its forehead. Nothing could be done about it because New Orleans's finest were firmly in the pocket of the Lullaby man's Ringtooth gang. Of course, this was 1928 and the police were more likely to be found in a man's pocket than a set of keys, yet paying off the police proved to be no guarantee of protection. The grainy black and white photo showed the Lullaby man on his back with arms and legs stilted upwards like the broked limbs of a smacked roach. Then, right up the middle, stopping just short of his neck, something had reduced Jefferson Lalleman to a pin-striped pancake. His head was cocked forward, chin to neck, dead eyes bulging as they saw it coming, whatever in the hell it was. The Lullaby man's mouth was locked open in a never ending scream of blood and vomit. Broken ribs cut through the sides of his jacket like a set of knives. He died with a .38 revolver in one hand and a sawn-off hogleg in the other, both

empty. Apparently, Jefferson had come to the warehouse looking for a gunfight only to find the heavy end of a small steamroller. Samuel bit his lip as he hissed a breath in thought. It was harsh. It was chilling. Not cool enough to break the prickly hedgehog of mid-summer heat, yet icy all the same. Sam, pinned the photo to his wall of suspicious leads and walked out onto the balcony to think.

The story had a world of problems. For one thing there were no steamrollers on this side of town. Road work in the French Quarter meant waiting until the street had become a muddy rut and then hiring some poor team of bastards to pepper it with cobblestones. New Orleans was still a horse driven town. The rich loved their carriages and the shippers loved cheap bray horses they could whip to death on the trudge between the docks and the rail yards. It got so hot in August, that the asphalt of a proper road would come up on people's shoes like chewing gum, and no one would stand for that. Was there even a steamroller in all of New Orleans? What had levelled the Lullaby man? What had happened to any of them?

People turned up dead all the time in this city, but rarely did they ever simply disappear, and never in numbers like this. Vincent Magill, vicious leader of the Front Street Devils, disappeared June 15th. The rest of the Front Street Devils, disappeared June 17th – 19th. Vaughn & Roxy De Jean, an extortionist and his gun moll, June 21st. Maud Corduroy, who ran sweatshops on the north-side with all the tenderness of an old world plantation, June 23rd. Phillipe Byrd, the Ice Baron, who controlled every ice factory in the city and had lynched more than a few union leaders to keep it that way, June 25th.. Benji Smallwood, loan shark, June 26th. Boss James Dixon Carlyle, stodgy confed-

erate veteran and local grand wizard of the KKK, June 27th. Jack "Suds" Malone, bootlegger and needle beer purveyor, June 30th. Johnny Torrentino, a fine trumpet-player who wouldn't hurt a fly - and if you believe that then you have never worked the crime beat - disappeared July 1st.

In most cases the people of the delta couldn't be happier. With Carlyle and Corduroy gone there might even be a Fourth of July celebration this year. In most minds a vigilante was nothing more than a cop who had finally gotten around to doing his job. Then Suds Malone disappeared. Malone had been a modern day Robin Hood, turning a good chunk of his bootlegging profits into food for the poor. And Torrentino? That was a high voltage. Johnny was good, very good, the hottest thing in town. Blowing the bugle around the Quarter was akin to going to confession. The louder and more rangy the sound, the greater the expurgation of sin for everyone involved, and no one in the Quarter blew louder than Torrentino. He was a saint. Johnny was missed before it was certain he had actually gone missing.

Samuel stared back at the black steel keys of the Underwood typewriter on his desk. He tried to think. What to write? What to write? The news waits for no one. He sidled up to it quietly, so as not to startle the brewing story out of it. Should he start with a V for "Vigilante Strikes Again. Victim Found!!!" or a P for "Psychopath Still At Large! Disappearances Point to Murder!!!!" And did it really matter so long he whacked out the right number of exclamation points? Samuel was a finger press from hitting the V when he first heard it, a sound like a distant thunderclap rumbling in the distance. To this he paid no mind. A summer day rarely passed without an afternoon thundershower. Of course, the afternoon had somehow slipped onto the edge of eight thirty. A second thunderclap followed closely and then a third and a fourth. Heavy was too soft and squishy a word for what was hammering its way down the street. This was more like the dropping of millstones from a hot air balloon. Samuel got up to check the window. The sky outside was hazy, yet thin enough to let a few needles of starlight poke through. Down on the street stood a lone figure, face hidden in the shadow of a brown fedora. His hands gripped the portentous, barrel-bellied body of a Thompson submachine gun and Sam didn't need to see any more. He dropped with

a soft thud to the floor. Back in Chicago he once stood transfixed by a similiar sight for a just second too long and had his coffee cup blown out of his hand, leaving only a porcelain ring on his index finger. The two other reporters standing beside him were not so lucky. Everybody loves the press.

"Samuel J Ponticliff." said the man with a gravelly voice, "Why don't chu come down here so as we can ah..., chew the fat, all nice and peaceful like?"

Samuel bellied over to his desk and quietly rolled open the lowest drawer. From behind a small bottle of bathtub gin he pulled two nickel plated Colt .45 automatics, steel-line specials, and weighed them in his hands to make sure they were still loaded. The clicks of popping cartridges in and out of the grips would have been just a few clicks too loud.

"Sounds good to me," Sam called out, "I'll be right down. Just let me put my shoes on."

"Sho 'nuff! But don't you keep me waiting. It ain't neighborly to keep a person waitin'."

Sam wanted to believe he recognized the voice, but he gritted his teeth and forced the notion out of his mind. You always want to believe you recognize the voice. In a strange situation you always grasp for anything you know, even if it means making things up. Sam hardened on the facts. The guy out there was a local. Creole, not Cajun. He wore a suit and hat, the camouflage of the businessman. Oh yes, and he was also lying through his teeth as sweetly and completely as a water moccasin in a ditch.

Sam stood up and tip-toed to the window. Just as he turned to point the guns and shout "freeze!" the wall beside him exploded like a string of firecrackers. Wood splinters and plaster chunks flipped through the air as bullets skidded across the ceiling and lodged into the lattice work. A hot lance of fire ripped between Sam's stomach and his elbow, causing him to forget everything but a red scream of rage as he turned towards the street and opened fire. Bullets twinged, twanged and sparked across bare cobblestones.

What the hell?

Sam checked his shirt to make sure he'd been grazed and not ventilated then quickly reloaded both pistols. Just because the guy was no longer out front didn't mean he'd gone home. Sam crept downstairs. It was best to guess that the man was a professional. If so, he would not be in the living room or the kitchen but out

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on the back porch, standing just to the left of the screen door and waiting for Sam to run out in a panic. Sam had written up more reports of bullet ridden stool pigeons than he cared to admit, and where gangsters were concerned, he considered the back porch to be the most dangerous place in the house. Quietly Sam slipped out the front door, keyed the lock, slunk down the steps and ran off into the night. In the distance there was that sound again, thunder without lighting, the beating of stone drums by steel hammers.

Sam's mind spun like a carousel as he stopped in the darkness between gaslights to think. Vigilante or Psychopath? If given the chance to write his article he would definitely begin the clicketty-clack on a P stroke. But why? Why me? He knew this to be a stupid question. It's because he's a nut-job, dummy, that's more than reason enough. Still, the former question stuck. Crime doesn't happen without something financial to the right of the question mark. There was always a reason. A voice spilled like syrup through the thick stand of privets behind him.

"It's cause you done me wrong, boy."

Sam screamed a falsetto, jumped forward and spun around – all in one motion – to land crouching with both guns trained on a row of bushes. There was a thunderclap and the man in the suit appeared at the far end of the street, standing in a kerosene pool of street light.

And that was when Sam saw the shoes.

Two ham-thick slabs of concrete sprouted off of his ankles. When held together they faintly resembled the tin wash basin they had been poured in, only these were not the Chicago standard in wiseguy wear. They had been split down the middle with a rough cut that left just enough room for each foot to be lifted up and slammed forward.

Sam skittered behind a postal box just as the Tommy Gun began to crackle and spit. The bullets tore into the blue metal and broke through one side but only dented the end against Sam's back. They felt like hits from a ballpeen hammer on his shoulders, and it took all his strength to not go tumbling forward. Once the gun's firing pin ticked on an empty chamber, Sam bolted upright and laid into him with both .45's blasting. With the cement shoes to anchor the man to the ground, he simply bounced around the bullets, doing an elastic dance like one of those bakelight toys the kids had

where they pumped the base with their thumbs. The gangster swung around on his ankles, arms jiggling and swinging in the swooping arc.

"Oh Sam," he cried, "You're just killing me here!"

Once the salvo was over, the gangster bent backward from his ankles to grab his hat up off the pavement. Sam ejected the spent clips from his guns and patted his vest for extras he knew he didn't have. He turned to run, only to find himself standing face to face with the hitman, or as close as the two cement shoes would allow. The creature was only human in silhouette. Up close it was sticks and mud and a dredged up corpse. The cloth of his suit was clotted with dirt and stunk of the river banks. Maggots wriggled and trickled from its shirt sleeves. More writhed out from a slice of cheek that had been torn back to the sinews. One shoulder held the handle of a deeply planted butcher knife. The other was so broken it looked ready to slide off and onto the ground. One of Sam's own bullets – as he had seen, targetted, and placed the hit – carved a valley through the side of the thing's skull. The cut now flowed over one ear with a black stew of rotting brains, apparently working yet no longer needed.

"You know Mista Samuel.," the creature gargled, "You really should have just died when I called you out."

Without waiting for a reply, the thing purposefully swung a rock foot back and brought it forward with all the swift conviction of a wrecking ball. It aimed to demolish Sam's nuts and hit....

\* \* \*

The Circus is in Town! Hoo-Ray! Hoo-Rah! Kids and cotton candy fill the stands. Bears on unicycles juggle brightly colored balls. The curviest Irish lass in the universe turns a sparkly blue sequined cartwheel on a death-defying length of highwire, far above the Earth. Sam, himself, stops only for a moment to straighten out the waxy ends of his mustache and wave to the happy crowd before sliding into the cannon around his waist. He is a human eagle in the gold and white silk of his aviator's costume. His confidence is strong! Astounding! Triumphant! ELEPHANTINE! Until it becomes evident that the compressed spring which normally sits coiled beneath his feet has been replaced by a keg of TNT. The ring master calls for applause as he lights

the fuse.

The edge of the cannon is barely a foot beyond Sam's grasp, but in being unable to wiggle upwards it might as well be a mile. Silence. The fuse is gone. A hush falls over the crowd. The rippling explosion between Sam's legs stretches every nerve in his body until they splinter. A fraction of a second and he has sliced like a razor through the canvas of the big top and is screaming through the atmosphere, flying among the cut silver of stars, planets and a moon made of cheese. Then he is beyond it, beyond everything, falling through perfect darkness, and perfect silence, twisting like a cat trying to find its feet, howling without a sound.

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When Sam came to, head throbbing and back aching, the inability of the single incandescent bulb above his head to touch a wall told him that he was in a warehouse or a stock room of some sort. A tug horn sounded in the distance and he figured himself to be near the wharf, possibly right on the water's edge from the smell of it. Not that this mattered a whole lot, with hands chained up and legs strapped to a crate, it was obvious he wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. Half of the crate's bottom had been hacked out so a washer woman's clothes pan could be fitted under it and leave whoever was sitting there with their feet hanging directly over its center. Sam glanced down to see his toes wiggling in their socks and started to panic.

"Bouncin' and rattlin' around like that ain't gonna do you no good, reporter man."

"What are you!?" barked Sam

"Why'se not try 'Who are you?' That'd be a right more sociable."

A grating sound accompanied the creature as it labored in the darkness. It wasn't just dragging its feet now but something else, equally heavy.

"Okay, Who are you!"

The creature smiled as best it could. "The name was Vincent Magill. However, you may know me as Julius Lester."

"Of the Front Street Devils!?"

"One and only! But dat's not how it is. Now is it?"

Julius Lester. Julius Lester. Samuel plowed his brain trying to remember where he had heard that name before. Far too many names passed through his office, but this one did have a familiar ring. A hand snapped

out of the darkness to backside him across the face.

"And I quote, 'May 15th, bank robbery, middle of the night. The police investigation is being helped by a witness to the crime, Julius Lester.' Does that sound familiar? That's your damn writing! You ratted me out, you sonofabitch, and for the one time in my life when I really didn't deserve it!"

A slamming of gears brought the cement mixer to life. A cloud of dust and a bucket of water soon had the machine churning sludge.

"Impossible! No." Sam pulled on his chains to no avail. "I-I made that name up!"

"Then youse pretty good at the guessing game now ain't chu. See. I made up Vincent Magill. Julius Lester is my real name. I planned and purpurtrated that bank heist! Everything went perfectly, then the gang read your column over breakfast, pegged me for a rat, and had me sitting right where you is by lunchtime."

"Ridiculous! I said I made that name up! What part don't you understand! I mean, yes it's not right but it's what I do. It's what the public wants. Names, Dates, Quotes and Exclamation Points. That is the news! But I swear I check the phone book every time! I make sure no one is using the names I need when I make things up."

Julius bent down, grabbed the levelling arm of the mixer and tilted it to pour. The cold grit of cement fell in clumps around Samuel's feet. His leg muscles charly horsed as he strained to break them free from the leather straps.

"Do you really think I am someone who can be found in the phone book?"

Sam stared at him, fuming, hoping anger alone could somehow set him on fire. Julius seemed simply amused.

"Bad Luck niether lives nor dies, Sam. It just gets passed along from person to person. Yup. It weren't too long ago I was sitting right were you are at. Confused. In anguish. Pissed all to hell with icy cold rock forming around mah feet. And wait until it hardens up. Den it gets all sharp and edgy, makes you feel like you're standing in a box of broken glass. I tried to remember everything I had ever read about Harry Houdini, about whether he had ever performed in cement shoes. But nope, nothin' there. And it's not like he'd share his secrets even if he had. Then those back stabbin' sons-abitches of mine purpurtrated the mutiny. That killed me. To them I had become just another Jack to knock



the mazula out of. That's loyalty for ya. In broad daylight those bastards wheeled me out to the end of that dock, screaming for help, mercy, my mammies love – but nothin'. I went plunk in the water like a sack o wet flour, and down. Down. Down. Down."

Julius leaned forward from his ankles and picked out a pinch of cement. It was a little stiffer than bread dough. "Almost there," he smiled, "this quick dry stuff works wonders." His shoes boomed as he paced, bow-legged along the edge of the light. Sam wondered how anyone outside could not hear it.

"You know what?" Julius continued, "I like you Sam. You're a damn good shot. Ya don't hesitate. Surprised the hell out of me to tell the truth. So I'llze tell you a little more. While floating down to the bottom of the Mississippi, I knew I was done for. That was it. As soon as I exhaled I knew nothing more would happen to me in my lifetime. Next stop was Hell or oblivion – depending on what you believe. Then I saw a spark in the dark water, a shimmer of white flowing towards me, growing as it came. It was an angel in flowing robes, swimming like a fish. I thought for sure I was dead, but no – he said – I was only close to it. My life flashed before my eyes and I realized that even though I had done much to make the world a bad one, it had always been the influence of other people that tarnished the soul of the sweet little boy I once was. And the angel agreed. He knew when a wrong had been done and that revenge should be mine. He touched the rock around my feet and split it in two. Soon I was crawling and coughing my way up onto the banks. That angel gave me powers you can't even fathom. I could punch a hole through a cinderblock wall. I could just close my eyes and think myself somewhere, anywhere I had ever been before. Do you have any idea how amazing that is?"

At this Julius stopped, pulled out the sides of his trousers and grinned with what was left of his face, "Now if only I could get a fresh pair of pants. It's kinda hard to get the cuffs off with the shoes still on. Still, it's an amazing thing." He checked his watch. "Times up! You got an appointment to keep and I don't intend to keep you waiting. Got three more people to kill before I'm done with my list."

Samuel stuttered with fear. Keep him talking. It's your only hope. Keep him talking and someone will hear. Keystone cops will rush in and smack him silly

with their clubs, they just have to.

"So you killed the rest of your gang?"

"You bet! First thing on my mind," said Julius, unstrapping Sam from the crate, lifting the rock out of the tub and setting it on a roller dolly. "But believe me, you had it easy. I tenderized those boys with a crowbar first. Nobody ever deserved it more."

"Vaughn & Roxy De Jean?"

"The girl I loved, and the guy she went off an married. That's where I got this nice knife in my shoulder. I keep it to remind me of Roxy."

"Maud Corduroy?"

"Poisonous bitch. Taught me to steal and then disavowed all knowledge of me once I got caught. Boy was she ever surprised to see me again."

"Boss Carlyle?"

"Kilt my pappy in a fixed duel. One of those guns wasn't loaded and it wasn't his."

"Phillipe Byrd?"

"Foreclosed on the family farm. Put us all out in the street."

"Jefferson Lallemand?"

"Stomped him flat, just for the fun of it. He really had it coming."

"Benji Smallwood?"

"Never heard of him."

"Suds Malone?"

"That man never put enough beer in his so-called beer. Well, Lookee here. Q&A time is over because we are at the end of the dock."

Sam had been aware of it. It was hard not to notice the pier shaking on its timbers under Julius's heavy steps, but some part of him believed that if he kept asking questions new boards would appear and they could simply go on walking forever. Now he was standing upright with barely an inch of wood before a six foot plunge into the black waters of the Mississippi. He felt every quake and vibration sink straight to his belly. Julius leaned forward and whispered into his ear, "call the Angel Sam. Right now, he's your only hope."

"Wait!" Sam cried and thrashed from side to side, "Whait!. What about Johnny Torrentino?"

Julius paused for a moment, trying to place the name. His grin tightened into a sneer. "Oh yes, the trumpet player. Why. He once looked at me funny."

The dolly tilted. Sam felt his feet tugged forward as if chained to the unrelenting pull of a locomotive. A

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shift in gravity and Sam was wheeling through the air.

A roaring splash. A sinking schlump. Soon Sam was standing upright on the river bottom, thirty feet down and with pressure squeezing the sides of his head like a clamp vice. He could see nothing and hear nothing yet seemed to feel everything. Cold water rushed over his skin as he tried to twist loose. His cheeks ballooned and almost ripped in an attempt to hold in every spare bubble of air. Fear rippled up his spine as – right at the exact moment when he was pondering Julius's suggestion – a white spark appeared in the murky distance and weaved its way forward. For a moment, Sam totally forgot what was happening and nearly dropped his jaw in awe.

"Don't speak," it thought to him with a quiet symphony of pleasant tones, "I can hear every thought you think, and you can hear mine."

"Every thought you think?"

"Every one."

"You weren't supposed to hear that."

"I hear everything. No secrets remain hidden from me, Samuel James Ponticliff."

Sam smirked and a few precious bubbles slipped between his teeth. Quickly, he thought a shout across, "Can you get me out of here!?"

"Of course, that is what I am here for. However, my assistance is not inexpensive."

"Um, I think I have my wallet on me."

The angel seemed unstirred. That wasn't it now was it? Of course not. He could probably summon up all the money in the world with just a snap of his fingers. You want my soul don't you? What else could you possibly want? What else did he have left to give?

"Such a sour notion," thought the angel, "Tainted by the dabblings of underpaid wordsmiths. I like to think of it as forging an alliance. Like when you pledge the allegiance to your flag or join the army. That's all. You do a few things for me. I do a few things for you. We'll straighten out the details in the future. Whaddya say Sam?"

Desperate for anything, Sam almost agreed, until tripped up by the slight realization that the angel was now talking to him with his own midwestern twang. He had come in like a choir boy but now he was laying out vowels flatter than Kansas. Sam's left eyebrow angled upwards. This was his bullshit antenna, and it went up automatically, usually while taking notes on

senators talking about tax dollars.

The angel grew slightly miffed by Sam's silence. "Look at where you're at Sam. Look at what has happened to you. Do you really want to put any more trust in a force which would let such a crime be committed?"

Sam tightened his lips. You could have arrived a tad bit earlier.

The angel stretched out his arms. From first glimpse the angel was human, perfectly human, the high water mark of perfection, yet his skin glowed with a pale fluorescent light which couldn't be natural. With arms upraised, he now beamed with it, shining a cold radiance over the area. The light reminded Sam of a diner at 3 AM, a place where the food didn't taste half bad, yet looked dead on a plate as soon as it was served.

"Is this what you want for your future Sam? Rot. Filth. Decay. Abandonment."

Sam wondered what the angel was talking about, and then caught a glimpse of it in his peripheral vision. He would have jumped out of his shoes, if at all possible. There in the water next to him swayed a baker's dozen of tortured corpses, chained up, roped down, and anchored to the river bed by large stone blocks. A few of the older ones had already been skeletonized by the pecking of fish and the ripping of crabs. Boss Carlyle, who was no more than two feet away, was bloated like a gas bag ready to pop. Johnny Torrentino, not far beyond him, was barely a bruised blur, only identifiable by the dented, crumpled and broken coronet Julius had chained to his chest.

"Tell me Sam, what faith lets this go on unchecked?!"

Sam's chest clenched. It sucked against the top of his throat and he felt razor blades of pain wriggle into his cheek bones. The air had gone stale in his lungs. He looked at the angel. In the increased light he saw something he'd missed before. A long black tentacle, as thick as a used tire, leading out of the silken gown and spiralling back into the water. It thickened as it went until it disappeared in the darkness, or possibly became the darkness. A lucid flash and Sam realized he wasn't talking to an angel at all but a gossamer finger puppet on the hand of something so black and massive it needed to lie on its belly to remain hidden under the world's oceans. It had every fang ever birthed in its jaws and every tentacle that had ever strangled a man

thrashing from its sides. A word bubbled up from his subconscious – Tartarus – but in the oxygen starved furnace of his mind came out – tartar sauce.

\* \* \*

"Honey, do we have any tartar sauce. These fishes are almost fried."

"Check the ice box again. I swore I saw a jar in there yesterday," answers Samuel Ponticliff Senior to his wife. It is a beautiful summer day in Kansas, without a cloud from horizon to horizon. Sam Senior slips his great uncle's heavy glass monocle in his shirt pocket and pulls Sam Junior close to his side. Junior is sullen, thick with that strange mixture of anger and embarrassment which accompanies any child caught having too much fun.

"Still," says Sam Jr, "They're only ants. You step on 'em as often as I do."

"Not intentionally I don't. And you were burning them down. You were taking delight in their helplessness."

No comment.

"Boy, you know what the law of the land says?"

"No. What?"

"That you have to eat everything you kill. Bugs, gnats, worms, fishes. That's why it's not a crime to kill chickens and pigs. Because we eat them, their lives have not ended in vain. When you kills something though, be prepared to eat it. And that goes for everything. Chipmunks, squirrels, birds, even a kid at school. The law of the land says that you've got to roast them up and go at 'em with knife and fork. And you'll do it with everyone watching. You got to eat it all in one sitting, chewing away – bite by bite – until there's nothing left but bones."

"EEhwww....."

"That's right. I'll let the ants slide this time. But next time I catch ya, you're gonna get a whole plate of sun fried ants to spoon down. And I and the whole family are going to sit there and make sure you lick up every last one of them."

"Daddy, is it wrong to die?"

Samuel senior sits on the front porch swing and clenches his shoulder blades. His joints crackle with age. He wonders if the boy can hear this or if they are only loud to himself. From this vantage point he can

see nothing but a green sea of corn with slight golden tufts of flax swaying on the breeze. It's going to be a beautiful harvest come autumn. The almanac said that 1903 would be a bountiful year for both corn and barley. It was a shame he didn't plant more barley.

"No son. 'Taint wrong to die. It's just wrong to kill. Kill anything you don't eat, that is. But it ain't wrong to die. Everything born is destined to die. It happens so often that sometimes you don't even notice it. The important thing is to not bring into the world anymore pain than is necessary. Your pain or someone elses. Pain is the only real evil. Pain ain't never right."

"You're silly."

"And you're silly too."

A blink and Sam was back in the water, angel in his face, hand in his hair, helping him hold on, even though he knew it was time to let go.

"So whaddya say Sam? Surely you have some scores to settle. Help me take revenge on this cruel, heartless world. You don't have to be a zombie. I've released people as hoodlums and plague rats and even house fires and floods. Julius was just a very imaginative person. So whaddya say Sam? Don't get mad, get even."

To this Samuel looked up and said, Blooop. Only it wasn't so much an utterance as it was the release of any dead air he had been desperately holding on to. Burble burble bloop! His sight faded as it focused around the slow waddle of bubbles moving towards the surface. The world went dark. And then he felt something. It was his feet sliding free of the rock. They moved up around the cold bones of his ankles, and he did a flutter kick as they passed through his knees. Sam snapped his hands forward and flowed upwards. Fingers broke the surface of the water without cutting a wave and lifted him into the air.

Below a distant memory beat fists of rage into what remained of his ribs. Above him the sky was sliding into the violet dress of a rising dawn. All over the French Quarter the air was a rich mix of roasting coffee and deep fried beignets. The smells sparkled on senses stripped free from the hard shellac of decades of smoking and drinking. Sam laughed as he floated over Jackson Square, the Court of the Two Sisters, and the House of the Rising Sun. Sidney Beckett was still awake, up on the roof of the Wellington Social Club and bending notes out of his clarinet as if nothing had passed since the party began at six the night before. The

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notes moved through Sam like silver and were shined on by the flares of the sun. Fresh over the horizon, the flaming orb was big and bright and warm and welcoming. In it, center stage, stood Johnny Torrentino with jet black skin and a robe of fine white linen, cheeks pouched out as he blazed away on a horn of purest gold. The coronet let loose a razzling sound which held in itself the promise to level the walls of a thousand Jerhicos a million times over – if need be.

Sam suddenly knew where he needed to be and swam for it.



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# Tales from Coalkeep (part one)

## Timelessness

by J.R. Care



### Introduction to Tales of Coalkeep

**T**HERE ARE ENDLESS WORLDS in the imaginations of people. Such worlds come to life vividly in the mind and play out like dazzling movies. My world however came to life not through fast-paced movie scenes with high-budget special effects. No, my world came to life in a vintage black and white slide-show that told me stories of a new world, wild and untamed. A world where the fantastic met with the violence of the wild-west and somewhere among it all was Dante's Inferno bubbling deep in the depths of this land called Morgue. I knew I had to tell the stories of heroes and outlaws who inhabited this dark frontier where ancient magic met with revolvers and shot-guns. And the closest description to this entire world I could come up with would be Clint Eastwood walking through Dante's Inferno, through a Paradise lost and looking for Purgatory. The tales have to begin somewhere, with someone and after much brainstorming I decided to present "The Tales of Coalkeep" as a mini-series of gruesome explorations throughout the land of Morgue.

So prepare yourself for a wickedly enchanted journey into the dark frontier . . .

When All the Children begin to Pray  
The beasts of the Night all go Away  
Into the Shadows one will Chase  
A Choice of Faith or Not, one will Face  
Gods can Bless thee but Gods can damn thee  
Through omniscient eyes They do See  
To cleanse the soul of this terrible world  
Before the Four Corners all begin to curl  
And the Four Archangels begin to go blind

The rivers of our world will flow red as wine  
When the Devils come to take the Western throne  
They will cast a Demonic Glare to chill our bones  
And then forevermore will we bow to Dis  
And an unseen Savior the world has yet to kiss  
For being eternal slaves to our mortal sins  
Are we all Doomed to a blistering fiery end?  
~Corinthius Shademoor the Bard of Gallowmere

Poetry is a most elegant expression of our deepest sensualities and our gloomiest fears. They are the true prophecies from the ancient bards who saw our modern world. And they knew it was damned. At least that is what I have come to believe. Poems are words without the exquisite pairing of soul-provoking instruments to make them into songs and unforgettable ballads for the aristocratic masses to revel in. Violins, trumpets and bass fiddles, the orchestra of doom.

I once reveled in the sound of music. I have the sound of doom. I, Ambrose Talbot, "The Wealthy", I gave myself the title. That was long ago though I cannot be sure how long ago it truly was. You see, a curse befell my great abode in Coalkeep. Perhaps it was a punishment for my avarice nature or my obsession to cheat death.. Now like the poems and lyrics in the vast books lining my Great Library, irony has perched upon my shoulder. For without time and without people there is no use for riches or luxury or to fear the Reaper. And without time there is not much reason for anything at all. My entire castle was removed from the world to be nestled somewhere in this petrified forest where the animals sleep eternally as stone. Time does not march forward here; instead time has come to a complete halt. All my subjects, even the ones who were my friends, they too have become solid statues who do not move nor speak no matter how much I beg them.



Perchance I am wrong and it has only been a few months since the curse was placed but for all I can tell it has been decades but in the end it does not really matter because I am forever trapped within the cold stone walls of Castle Coalkeep. I am not immortal and death could be so easy but this is punishment enough and I fear what horrific torture suicide will bring me. I know Hell is real because I have seen the devils who call it their homeland, their boroughs in the ditches cut through brimstone hills and cathedrals made of bone where the commanders of Hell's legions reside. For eternal redemption, sinners are relentlessly tormented in the various circles of Hell, I'm sure you've heard the stories before.. I am already the Lord of my own Hell here within the walls of Coalkeep. Forevermore I shall walk endlessly through the long corridors, up and down the spiraling staircases and I shall partake again and again the sights of the petrified forest, the marbled gardens and the frost white stone that was once flowing water in the mote and fountains. I have even become a prisoner of my own black cape for all the clothes are now dust.

On rare occasions, some weary traveler from Morgue stumbles upon a gate that leads them to Coalkeep's stone forest and through the thickets of bull nettle that surround the keep. The portals are hidden all around Morgue, in coal mines, behind waterfalls, through gaps in walls and all other mysterious locations. But I cannot use them for the curse prohibits me from every leaving. But travelers do visit. I show them around the castle, let them gaze upon the statues that were once my fleshy subjects, I allow them to read the vast collection of tomes in the Great Library and I always show them the Hall of Portraits where I stand now.

Each portrait was the masterpiece of a wizard who dabbled in oils. He painted the most beautiful landscapes from all around Morgue. The city gates of Lynch Gate, the golden farmlands in Gallowmere, the horizon pressing hard against the backdrop of Clockdust Mountain and even the luscious bronze peaches ripe on the trees in Orchard Dale. With each portrait the wizard completed he enchanted with a spell he was quite proud to have learned, a spell of teleportation allowing instant travel to the portrait's location. And before the timelessness curse, I used the portraits to travel Morgue and see the beautiful sights even the corrupted port city of Lynch Gate. But now the portraits' enchant-

ments are useless to me but not their brilliant colors! I can still enjoy the world through the paintings. I even yearn to see Lynch Gate one more time and enjoy the saloons and midnight shows. How would I love to walk the streets of Rainville, the capitol of the Northern Territory, Or perhaps the splendid beauty always imbued upon the Southern Land.

And what do I sense now? A new visitor has entered Coalkeep. I can sense his confusion, his questions . . .

I have gained the sense of clairvoyance in all my time trapped here. I can always feel the presence of life when it comes to my petrified world. Even now I can tell my new visitor is approaching the bull nettle barricade, he will see the concrete mote encircling this castle and ascend the steps into Castle Coalkeep.

I should go now and greet this new wanderer. He is ascending the steps to the gate now. My pale features may startle him, I look ghastly, as they do most but in this cursed world there is no daylight so nightfall reigns forever but at least the torches on the wall burn just as long.

\* \* \*

"Greetings to you, fair traveler," I said standing upon the steps in the main foyer. The traveler before me looked weary, disheveled and had obviously just escaped from a dreadful fate. His brown leather vest and the red bandanna around his neck told me he was a gunfighter. "I bid you a gracious welcome to Castle Coalkeep." I said. I could feel the heat from the glowing torches around me and I knew he could only see a silhouetted profile of my being.

"Wh-what is this place? How did I get back to Morgue?" he asked in a gruff voice as he pushed back his wide brimmed brown hat.

And so again, I must show this man around and explain the intricate details of my accursed stone world. I will offer him any assistance he may need for in my own way it is all I can do to redeem myself for the sins I have indulged in. I help all the wanderers with their plights just to send them on their way and then return to my own aimless wanderings once more. Sometimes I wish one of them would stay and keep the loneliness away but they never do.

His name is Bastian Cardhart and as we spoke in my

humble banquet hall, I discovered much more than his name. Bastian is a man who comes a dime a dozen in Morgue. An outlaw, a gambler and a slave to the bottle. The first request he asked of me was for bourbon but here in Coalkeep there are no bottles with any liquid substance. As I said before I am not immortal but without time one does not become thirsty for every second is like a century. Bastian was not pleased with this and quite frankly neither am I since I too long for fresh red wine. But there is more to Bastian and I could tell from his aura that he was a troubled man running from shadows that persistently nipped at his heels. But there was also a swirl of goodness in his aura and I knew from that he was not a bad man just a troubled one.

The plight that had fallen on his shoulders was one I had encountered before in the old days when the forest surrounding Coalkeep was still emerald. Bastian had found trouble in the wilderness and a man of his demeanor cannot back away from perceived trouble. But Bastian had discovered too late that he had bitten off more than he could chew or rather it bit him. Now, he was infected with a were-disease which was evident from the black fur already sprouting on his arms and chest. It was not wolf-fur so I knew it had not been a werewolf that bit him and the one who had bit him had not been in the beast form.

"There is a cure, I am certain of it," I told him. I did know of a cure for I had seen it myself and it was written in many of the books in my library. "The Mourning Lotus contains three seeds within its three blossoms. As far as I know, the Mourning Lotus only blooms during the full moon high in the Bloodstalk Hills. If you devour those three seeds the were-disease will surely be cured."

"Bloodstalk Hills? That place north of Orchard Dale? But giants live in those hills! You must wanna see me dead."

"I surely do not wish to see you dead. It is true, many giants do live there. But it is the only way you will be saved. And if you are killed as a were-beast your soul will be lost. And I warn you, friend, once you become a beast your mortal mind will escape you and a hunger for flesh, bone, and blood will consume you. To quench your carnal desires you will kill anyone around you."

Bastian did not respond quickly. He took his time and sat there looking at me with his hazel eyes. For a moment I believed he was going to change before my very eyes and rip me to shreds! But he did finally clear

his throat. I could tell then that he was sincerely concerned about his soul.

"I'll just have to do it then," he said and he stood to his feet ready to face his adventure.

"I shall show you a shortcut back to Orchard Dale then, please follow me." And I led him through the torch lit corridors, up a flight of spiraling stairs, I led him all the way to the Hall of Portraits where I showed him the painting of a vast orchard. There were two roads cut through the orchard, one north-to-south and another west-to-east. Within the center where those roads met was the small community called Orchard Dale. And that is where Bastian Cardhart's adventure begins . . . .



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# QWERTY

by Michael A. Kechula



**H**ARRY WAS SURPRISED WHEN a highway patrol car with flashing lights moved directly behind him.

“What’s the problem, Officer?”

“Your license plate. How come it says QWERTY?”

“I’m a writer. I thought it was cool to use the first six letters of a keyboard.”

“How did you decide to use those characters? Did you meditate, or cry out to the gods for inspiration?”

“Nah. It came to me in a dream.”

“What else was in the dream?” the cop asked.

“Look, it’s bad enough you stopped me for no valid reason in the middle of the Mojave Desert, but I don’t see why I have to tell you my dreams.”

The cop pulled his pistol. “I’ll ask you one more time—what else was in the dream?”

“Don’t shoot! I dreamed a beautiful woman in white appeared and said it was extremely important for me to get a license plate that said QWERTY. Then she was gone. Being a writer, I thought it was a neat idea. So, I ordered this plate.”

The cop holstered his gun, fell on his knees and cried out, “QWERTY, QWERTY, QWERTY.” After repeating the word thirteen times, he ran to his car and spoke excitedly into his radio handset.

The cop was beaming when he returned to Harry’s car. “Oh Great Prophet, your humble servants will be here in five minutes. What can we do to make you comfortable until they arrive?”

Harry was dumbfounded. Before he answered, the cop fell on his knees and with outstretched arms chanted, “QWERTY,” thirteen more times.

A Cadillac stretch limo arrived. Out jumped six gorgeous women. They surrounded Harry’s car, fell on their knees, and chanted the same word.

“Please come with us in our humble limo,” said the cop. “The people await you with great eagerness.”

“I don’t understand,” Harry said. “But I’ll go, have some lunch, and then maybe you guys can bring me back here so I can be on my way. I was hoping to be in California by tonight.”

When they got into the limo, the cop said, “QWERTY is the sacred word we’ve been waiting to see on a license plate for generations. The Holy Scroll says, ‘He will come across the vast desert in a four-wheeled chariot. It will bear a plate upon which will be inscribed QWERTY. Honor him, for he is a Great Prophet. Give him all, for he comes unawares, sent by the Supreme Goddess. She will appeared to him in a dream. He will obey her holy words.’”

“And now you’ve come,” said a stunning blonde, who bowed while reverently touching Harry’s sleeve.

“You sure you ain’t making a mistake?” Harry asked as the limo rolled into the small town crowded with cheering, bowing people. When he saw all the flowers they were showering on the limo, he stopped asking questions and waved.

The mayor welcomed Harry with a deep bow. “Oh, Great Prophet, we are ready to immolate ourselves as the Holy Scroll

directs, to gain our eternal reward and free the souls of our ancestors. Tonight, we will hold the ceremony.”

“Look,” Harry said. “I’m just passing through. I’m al-most broke. I lost my job. I hear they’re hiring in Silicon Valley. If you guys want, maybe you can pass a hat around to help me pay for some gas.”

“Listen how humbly he denies his exalted stature,” said the mayor. “Just as the Holy Scrolls predicted. Chapter seven, verse ten says, ‘He will deny all and pretend to be a man of little consequence. He will be

on a journey to the Vale of the Silicones.”

Everyone fell to their knees and chanted, “QWERTY,” thirteen times.

Harry pondered the situation and its implications. He’d tried to dissuade the mayor. But the guy wouldn’t listen. No sense trying again.

Harry realized he was dealing with a deeply engrained belief system. Who was he to turn their world upside down, and try to dissuade them? He decided to go along with their wishes long enough to escape at the first opportunity.

His plan changed when informed that HE was the one appointed by the Scrolls to light the funeral pyres for the town’s entire population. As they cooked, he was to read the sacred verses that guaranteed their transition into the Heav-enly Gardens of the Platinum City.

Seeing no chance of escaping, Harry figured if they wanted to burn, who was he to act against their religious beliefs? No doubt, they had cash, jewelry, SUVs, homes. After their demise, everything in town would be intact. With everybody gone, he could become the new owner of the town’s wealth. He could retire immediately, and live like a sultan. All he had to do was light one lousy match.

On the other hand, kids were involved. He wondered if it were murder to accede to the ardent wishes of religious zealots? Weren’t their beliefs protected by the Constitution? If he resisted too strongly, would they go crazy, turn on him, and torch him for not living up to their religious expectations?

He advised the mayor that he was prepared to fulfill his sacred obligations. He asked if documents could be prepared immediately to will every object in the entire town to him.

“The documents already exist,” said the mayor. “My secretary is adding your name at this very moment.”

City fathers organized a gigantic funeral procession. All 2,341 residents assembled within a gigantic gasoline soaked tent, surrounded by mountains of wood pilings.

Inserting earplugs, Harry lit the All Hallowed Match. As the fire roared, he read aloud the silly jingles somebody’d called sacred texts.

Afterward, he attached his QWERTY license plate to the late mayor’s Lexus convertible, and took inventory.

Bio:

Michael A. Kechula is a retired tech writer. His fiction has won first place in seven contests and second and third place in five others. He’s also won Editor’s Choice awards four times. His stories have been published by 107 magazines and anthologies in Australia, Canada, England, and US. He’s authored a book of flash and micro-fiction stories: “A Full Deck of Zombies--61 Speculative Fiction Tales.” eBook available at [www.BooksForABuck.com](http://www.BooksForABuck.com) and [www.fictionwise.com](http://www.fictionwise.com) Paperback available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



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# Beyond the Garden

by Natalie L. Sin



**T**HE WOMAN RAN THROUGH THE FOREST after her lover, oblivious in her lust to how far from home she was being led. Even as she fought her way through a tangled and long over-grown mass of thickets and vines her mind was fixed only on the chuckling, darting figure just out of her reach. He was being playful with her, she thought, as she burst through the hoary growth and into a garden rimmed with ancient hedges and deeply cracked stone walls. It was a place rich with shadows darker than even the starless night should have allowed, making the woman nearly blind to the figure sweeping her into his arms and tearing her nightgown in two.

She laughed as the sheer fabric fell away from her body and thought of the impossible pleasures she had already enjoyed since meeting her new paramour. The things he did to her body should have scandalized her, a married and respectable woman, but she was past caring. As her partner drove her body into the moist undergrowth with the force of his thrusts, she spread her legs wide to meet him. His grunts were thick in her ears and covered the approach of the rustling of vines that trailed from all corners of the garden to snake around her limbs. Only when they pulled tight, the thorns digging into her naked flesh, did she begin to realize her lover's true intent.

The demon watched as the woman was pulled thrashing and screaming across the ground. It had not taken long to seduce this one, even taking into account his influence over mortals. She never questioned why he came looking for her only at night, when his true features could be softened by darkness. She had been too eager to have a romance, to give into her sweat-soaked fantasies, and the demon had given her everything she'd dreamed of and more. He grew bored easi-

ly, however, and now his desire for cruelty outweighed his desire for the flesh. He stood back to observe the hungry flora to do its work for a while. Before he left, the demon took a moment to run a hand in mocking caress down the human's blood-slick cheek and wink into the eye the thorns had not yet taken.

The garden was denied its rightful feast that night. As it began to draw the blood and marrow from the woman's body a presence was detected. Conception between a human and demon was rare, yet the life within her could not be denied. The garden knew it would be risky to kill a child, even a half-breed bastard, with such a father. It showed restraint, taking only as much as it needed so that the growing child would not starve. For nine months the woman hung against a stone wall, her belly growing larger even as the rest of her body was chewed away. Her flesh became torn and tattered, her bones sucked clean, but the womb was kept sacred until finally her offspring poured down her legs in a pile of blood and afterbirth that the garden quickly fell upon and consumed.

Instinctively the newborn turned to suckle at his mother's breast, only to find them ruined. Wailing, he pounded tiny fists against her until the vines took pity and let him lick his mother's blood from their leaves while the garden gorged on what was left of her body and mind. The woman's last thought, if it could be called that, was a kaleidoscope of her life before. Her husband, their house at the edge of the forest, and the children she had raised for only a few short years before disappearing into the woods.

Her newest was an atrocity. Denied the features of his father, who had looked the part enough to trick his human prey, the half-breed instead resembled the beasts of the world below the garden. What passed for his eyes

were tiny and close together, two murky green marbles staring out of a misshapen face, and his skin was nearly translucent, covered in pale blue veins and fine blond hair. His mother's nose, small and well shaped, was perched atop a lipless mouth filled with crude spikes of teeth and ran nearly constantly with thick gray mucus. The rest of the body was shrunken and withered like a tiny old man, and when the child was old enough to walk he did so hunched and wary like an animal waiting for the strike from a snake. As an added cruelty, the child's mind was everything his body was not and he quickly realized that he did not belong in the place he had been born. The garden agreed, and delighted in tormenting him. It would whisper hateful things about his mixed blood and mock his solitude. Yet it was generous with details of the child's siblings and mother's widowed husband.

"They are close," the garden would whisper. "Only a few miles through the forest. When you are older and stronger, you can go to them."

The child, despite his intelligence, was brutally naive. He believed what he was told and learned to pin every hope for happiness on it. At night he slept on a handmade bed of moss and rotted leaves and dreamed of what the plants had explained was a proper bed, a place of warmth and peace where he would be dry and safe from the stinging bugs that lanced his skin while he slept, leaving behind aching pus-filled boils. He dreamed also of no longer having to scrounge for those same insects for food, choking down their sour venom and brittle hides. He would eat meat. Not the raw, rancid animal castoffs that the garden resentfully shared, but fresh cooked meat like his siblings enjoyed.

Five years passed before garden told him that time had come to leave. It soothed the child's fears of the unknown and reminded him that he would soon be with family.

"Why wait another minute," it urged. "Go before nightfall and you can meet them by dinner!"

The garden watched silently as the child forged his way through the hedges and slipped out of sight. When it saw he was truly gone, its leaves and branches began to shudder and vines rolled along the ground to spin in frantic circles. They were laughing at him.

\* \* \*

The child was amazed at the world beyond the walls of his birthplace: A forest dappled with late afternoon sunlight, where the leaves of the plants and trees were bright green instead of oily brown and bright bursts of color leapt up from the earth. These were "flowers," he had been told, and the child liked them very much. He paused to sniff them, using the back of his hand to brush aside the slow river of snot from his nose. It was a nice smell, light and playful. The child wished to bring some flowers with him as a gift for his family and regretted that he had nowhere to put them. Disappointed, he abandoned the pretty things and continued his journey. A spirited chorus of high musical notes filled the air above him. Some kind of animals, he reasoned, but his imagination was unable to provide any more insight. There were no birds back in the garden and the creatures that did live there were foul looking and never made nice sounds. They despised the child and his mixed blood, tolerating him only so far as to not butcher him as food or slay him for sport.

After traveling for some time the child decided to rest for a bit and leaned against a tree. He was startled when it stayed firm and did not pulsate beneath the bark, nor did the moss stretch to suck the sweat and oils from his skin. Feeling happy, the child amused himself with a patch of tiny mushrooms. He picked a few to taste and found that, while they were better than anything in the garden, they were far from delicious. After a while the blackened skin of his tongue began to itch and swell in his mouth. Alarmed, the child thought it wise to leave the mushrooms behind.

A little while later the child came upon a small waterfall spilling into a shallow stream. The water was cool and clear and the child took the opportunity to squat in the middle of the stream and clean himself. He splashed and scrubbed at his skin feverishly until the years of grime began to finally streak away. It would not do to meet his family unclean, the child thought to himself. They would think him no better than an animal. He continued to wash diligently and by the time he shambled out of the stream to shake off in the waning sunlight his body gleamed like a statue carved from polished bone. He glanced back into the water and considered his reflection, wondering if he was ugly. Surely he was no more hideous than many of those who had shared the garden with him. How different could humans be?

As the garden predicted, the child's journey took him into early evening. When he saw that the forest was beginning to end, tears rolled down his gaunt cheeks from relief. It had been a hard walk at time, with no clothing or shoes to protect him, and the child's feet were slashed raw and bleeding. Ever step stung, but thoughts of pain were erased when he saw the log house in the distance. He ran towards it, trailed by little red footprints, and as he got closer the child could see the character of the home. Flowering vines hugged the railing of the wooden porch, their furred blooms drooping sleepily in the night air, and a narrow stone path wound past a decorative fishpond. The child stopped to watch the patchwork colored fish swimming lazily below the surface of the water. Starved, he was tempted to grab one but strange and exotic smells pulled him back along the path towards the house. This, he imagined, was the human food the garden had described in such lush and mouth watering detail.

Feeling anxious, he crept carefully up the little stone steps and across the porch to the front door. The child tried to stand as straight as he could and to clear the worst of the mess from his nose. Not knowing what else to do with the slime, he wiped it under a wrought iron bench on the porch before he cautiously opened the front door. He didn't know to knock and planned to search for his family room by room. At the last moment he spotted long-stemmed flowers growing from a basket hanging from the window ledge. Pleased to have a present to offer after all, he plucked a pink one and held it protectively against his chest.

Inside he could hear the sounds of clinking glass and wood scraping the floor. Following the noises, he came into a small but tidy kitchen where two young girls were setting the table for supper. Nearly identical, they were only a few years older than the child and they shared his nose, though nothing else. Their eyes were spaced wider and were beautifully colored. Their skin was sun-kissed and healthy, shiny brown hair fell thick and long against their backs. Immersed in their nightly chores, they were oblivious to the child's presence for some time. As he watched, captivated, they chattered pleasantly as they arranged three sets of plates, glasses, and silverware around the table. When one sister turned to fetch a pitcher of milk from the refrigerator, the other's gaze wandered and fell upon their visitor.

The creature smiled at his sister. It was a nervous

smile, made worse by his lack of lips, and to the girl it looked like he was baring his teeth. She screamed high and shrill and was quickly followed by her twin. Both girls huddled against the far wall, hands drawn up feebly as protection against the monstrosity before them. The child, confused by their reaction, walked towards them to make amends. The thundering of footsteps on stairs drew him short as his mother's cuckolded husband raced to see the cause of his daughter's distress. Faced with a deformed intruder, he instinctively reached for the cutting knife on the table.

Weapon in hand the man slashed at the screeching, terrified child who tried to run past his attacker, thinking the man's anger would fade if the girls were left alone. Instead the knife came down in a silver streak and sliced open the skin of the child's arm, making him to howl in pain. Something sparked deep within him then, thoughts and urges that had never before visited his mind. His legs coiled and sprang, launching the child into the man's chest where he slashed with claws and teeth until blood sprayed into the air. The child dug his teeth into the man's throat again and again, taking delight in the way the tendons snapped between them. More blood gushed forward and into the child's eager stomach as what was left of his victim's strength fled.

The girl's shrieked as their father fell against the table and brought it crashing with him to the floor. Plates of food smashed and their contents flew across the floor to mix with a rapidly growing red pool as wet, snarling sounds of gluttony filled the air. It was too much for girls so young. They huddled against each other, faces hidden and hands clutched desperately together as they spared themselves the sight of their father's mutilation. His heart and lungs were dug out of his chest and devoured. When that was not enough, the child ripped the father's bowels open. A foul stench poured out, yet the garden-child was unmoved by it as he sucked up the ribbons of tripe until his own stomach bulged and stretched.

When he had no room to spare, the child stopped. Slowly his mind cleared and he began to understand what he had done. He waited for shame to come. It never did. The child looked down at his gore-slick hands, the thick fingernails filthy with blood and excrement, and stuck them in his mouth one had a time to savor the flavors. What he did wasn't so bad, the child told himself. The man was nothing to him. Worse, he had

attacked the child for no reason. The child considered the girls, who were of his blood. What were they to him now, fussing in the corner like that and looking at him with panic in their eyes when he hadn't even done anything wrong. The child sucked his thumb pensively while trying to figure out how to handle his quivering siblings. They were not like him; he could see that. They were like his mother, who had only been good for two things in her entire life according to the garden. The child suddenly smiled.

It was easier than he expected to get his sisters to come with him. He only had to hold the knife to one and the other came willingly. She could have escaped on her own, and the child marveled at this. He decided she was his favorite. All the way to the garden she cried softly. Only once did she dare to speak and beg him not to hurt her sister. The child hissed and pricked the other's skin enough to bring a thin seam of blood, after which she did not dare to speak. When they reached the borders of the garden his favorite obediently allowed him to tie her firmly to a tree. When he was sure that she could not be able to escape the child disappeared into the garden with the twin, her father's carving knife pressed tight against her stomach.

At first, the garden saw no reason to make a deal. It was selfish and in no mood to bargain with a half-breed. So the child explained what the garden could have, if only it did him the favor.

"Have patience," he coaxed sweetly, "and so much can be gained."

The garden pondered his words. It would be patient, it decided, and accept the gift the child offered. It would do exactly as he asked, providing that he kept his end of the agreement when the time came. With their deal set and sealed, the child left to fetch his other sister.

When she saw the garden the girl turned pale and began to tremble. She was still too fearful to speak, but the child knew she must miss her twin. He thought of placing them side-by-side but decided that it would be too upsetting for her to see what was being done to her sister. It would not be nice to make his favorite so sad the child thought, as he watched the garden build a cage of stone and vine. The fact that she could still hear her sister's screams could not be helped, but they were short lived. The garden had not known mortal flesh since his father had seduced the woman into its folds. One day, when his favorite was old enough, it would

be the child's turn. He would take his bride and she would bare his children. Surely some of them would look like him. The rest he would give to the garden.

Bio:

Natalie L. Sin has previously been published in "Necrotic Tissue" (issue 3) and "Strange, Weird, and Wonderful" (issue 1). She will also be appearing in the upcoming Northern Haunts (Shroud Publishing) and Tainted (Strange Publications) anthologies.



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# Whatch What You Say It Could Burn You!

by Gerry Tancreda



**M**ILDRED SIMMS REACHED FOR her hot cup of tea while looking out the window. She could not stop thinking about her brother Harry. Yesterday, he was home with her sitting in his chair. Today she buried him.

"I don't understand," Mildred said sobbing, "Harry never moved away from the TV so why was his body found in that old garage behind the house, with all those bite marks on his face"

She continued talking while sipping her tea. "That poor excuse of a sheriff said Harry died of natural causes. That idiot calls every death natural."

Mildred spoke quietly. "Don't tell me at sixty-two I am going to start talking to myself."

Suddenly the doorbell rang, causing Mildred to spill her tea.

"I told Harry to fix that damn bell. Oh Harry, I do so miss you."

As she opened the door, she saw a handsome, well-dressed man, standing on her doorstep.

He was tall and wore white gloves; which was unusual for spring.

"Mildred Simms, how nice to finally meet you! My name is Haylel, I met your brother yesterday and he thought that I might be of service to you in exchange for room and board."

Looking anxious. Mildred asked, "How do you know my name?"

"Your brother Harry told old Haylel exactly how you looked. A keeper, he said, and you sure are."

Mildred could not stop looking into Haylel's eyes. She felt like she was drowning in a great sea of depression and despair.

Finally, she broke eye contact and said, "I think you must have the wrong house, my brother died yester-

day."

Haylel took a deep breath and spoke slowly, "I am so sorry for your loss, I could not have come at a worst time. I did meet your brother last night, in Don's grill. It was very late in the evening and he was sitting alone. I asked if I could join him. Harry was a great talker, and he gave me his word that I could help around the house for room and board."

"I am sorry," Mildred muttered, "but helping around the house for room and board was Harry's job, why would he give someone else his job? He never left the house, so I doubt you met him at some grill."

Haylel gave a quick smile, and then become very serious. "I don't know, perhaps he knew he was going to die and did not want you to be left alone with all the chores that must be done. I promise you I did meet him in the grill."

"Sorry Sir, none of this makes sense to me." Mildred quickly closed the door, but not before Haylel, threw his business card in.

As the day wore on Mildred kept thinking of that odd man at the door. She thought about his eyes. She could not put her finger on it, but there was something wrong with him, yet she felt drawn to him.

Sometime during the night, Mildred began hearing flapping sounds outside her

bedroom window. It sounded like thousands of birds flying around her house. Too scared to get up and look, she just pulled the covers over her head.

At some point, she fell asleep and had a horrid dream of a huge black bird biting and scratching her face. Mildred awoke with a start, and screamed when she saw the blood on her pillowcase. She ran to the bathroom mirror and was shocked to see that her face was bitten and scratched.

Grabbing an old towel, she stumbled to the worn leather chair in the living room. Holding the towel tightly against her face, she began to sob uncontrollably. As if on cue, the doorbell rang.

Too shaken to answer the door, Mildred just sat there and cried.

She was shocked as the front door opened and there stood Haylel.

Mildred muttered, "How did you get in, the door was locked?"

"Now, now, Mildred, let's take care of that scratch before we talk about the minor things in life."

Haylel, removed the towel covering the side of Mildred's face, and went to the kitchen sink to rinse it out. Then he moved on to the bathroom and found some antiseptic that Mildred could not remember having. Kneeling down in front of her, he gently wiped the scratches with the towel and applied the antiseptic. Again, he went to the bathroom found some gauze and applied it over her wound.

"Please be careful" Mildred said, "I don't want you to get blood on that beautiful suit you are wearing."

"Well aren't you the dear worrying about me," Haylel said smiling. "I am worried about you. How did this happen?"

Mildred started crying again and spoke slowly, "I thought it was a dream that a bird was biting me, I guess it was real."

I Frowning he said, "How did the bird get in?"

"I don't know, I really don't."

Haylel rose from his kneeling position in front of Mildred and said sweetly. "Now do you believe that you need a man around the house?"

Looking up into his smiling face and ignoring his eyes, Mildred thought how scared and lonely she was. Finally, she replied—"Yes, I do need someone here."

"Fine, then I will stay and help you as much as I can." Looking around the living room Haylel continued. "Let me ask you a question; would you like to see your brother?"

"What a question," Mildred said as she slowly rose from her chair. "Of course, I would like to see him, but that's impossible."

Placing his arm around her shoulder, he whispered, "Nothing is impossible."

As nightfall approached, Mildred showed Haylel to her brother's old room. The bed was unmade and

dirty clothes were on the floor. The old furniture was dusty and the room needed a good airing out. Haylel did not seem to notice any of this. He told Mildred that he had to make preparations and he would see her in the morning.

Late in the night, Mildred woke to the sounds of birds flying around. This time they were not flying outside. The sound was coming from Haylel's room.

Thinking it was just her mind playing tricks on her, she went back to sleep.

The sun shining in Mildred's bedroom window woke her. Looking at the clock, she saw that it was after eleven. Smiling and dressing she thought that it had been a long time since she slept so late, and for the first time in a very long time she felt like making breakfast.

Slowly, she walked into the kitchen to put the tea on, but to her surprise, the tea was already made. Pouring herself a cup, she walked into the living room. Sitting in her favorite recliner, she glanced over at Harry's old chair. She began screaming and choking at the same time.

Harry jumped up and ran to his sister. "What is wrong?"

"Take a deep breath now, that's it, breath nice and slow."

Mildred grabbed her brother's arm and between sobs said, "You are dead, you can't be here."

"Dead? Are you nuts? I am right here where I always am, with you."

"No, Harry this can't be, you were found dead with bite marks on your face."

Harry walked over to his sister and sat on the edge of the recliner. Putting his arm around her, he kissed her cheek and said. "It was a dream, just a bad dream."

As Harry walked back to his chair—he vanished!

Mildred sat in shock for a few minutes. Then jumped up and began running in every room of the house looking for him.

Out of breath and in shock, she went back into the living room, only to find Haylel sitting in Harry's chair. At his side was a large black bird.

"Haylel," Mildred said as she tried to gulp air after each word, "My brother—he was here then he vanished!"

"Calm down my dear, I am so sorry that I scared you; we were just playing a trick on you."

"How can you play that kind of trick, make a person

appear and disappear?"

Mildred muttered as she tried to sip water.

"And why do you have that ugly bird in my house?"

Haylel clearly annoyed, sharply said, "This bird as you call it, is my son, Doyle."

As the name, Doyle was said. A loud flapping sound was heard, and suddenly the bird turned into a young man. Doyle looked at Mildred and grinned.

Mildred saw the evil in the red eyes of Doyle, and felt the terror that she was about to face.

"Now, that we have all met, let's continue." Haylel paced the floor as he spoke.

"Years ago when you were very sick, your brother said he would give up all he had just to make you better. And he did give his all; he gave his soul to me."

Stopping to take a sip of Mildred's water, and patting her back, he continued.

"Now, a few days later, as you were wheeled into the operating room, you said, Please help me, I will do anything, give anything. Help me."

Sweat was pouring down Mildred's face. Terror was filling every space of her being. With trembling voice she said, "I was talking to my creator not you!"

A hideous laugh filled the room, and Doyle began dancing around Mildred and pinching and biting her arms.

As the laughter subsided, Doyle went back to his father's side,

Wiping the tears of laughter from his face, Haylel continued,

"Your creator does not take from you; he gives to you. When you say, I will give you anything please help me. You are not talking to your creator; you are talking to me."

Feeling frozen in time, Mildred began to cry and muttered. "If you are the devil, why do you use the name of Haylel?"

Smiling, he sat next to Mildred and held her hand as he spoke.

"I have many names; Haylel is just one of them."

"Listen Mildred, to the sounds of your new home."

The walls of her home vibrated with the sounds of screaming suffering souls.

"Haylel, please I can't go there, I made a mistake. Please forgive me!" Mildred cried.

Standing taller than she had every seen him Haylel roared, "I am not—your creator old woman."

With a wave of his hand, Mildred was gone.

"Doyle" Haylel said, as he hugged his son. "Throw the body where you put her brother, and eat all of her flesh." "You are a growing boy."

With a smile and a wave, Haylel was off to find his next poor mistaken soul



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# Smiley

by Brick Marlin



**D**ONALD WEBBER WAS SMILEY.

He smiled all day, every day: morning, afternoon, and night. A happy, delightful soul living amongst the living.

With a great wife and two wonderful kids, who could ask for more?

The start of his mornings went as follows:

Up and out of the door by 7 am; driving to work while enjoying that fresh brewed cup of Joe; arriving and picking up his schedule for the day; climbing into the company truck; driving around picking up supplies and delivering them; then ending his final destination at home around 4 pm.

Donald didn't have much of a hobby life per say, but he did love to talk about sports: basketball, football, hockey, car racing, baseball—you name it. And whenever he was around the people that he worked with, he poured it to on as if he or she were dying of thirst in the Mohave Desert.

"You know, Ol' Donnie could be a sports writer," they would say, and: "Yeah, even a sports newscaster or commentator."

"That Donnie smiles from ear to ear, damn near taking up his whole face," they would add, and: "Donnie just seems to be a happy person!"

"Must be a wonderful husband and father, too!"

Sometimes he even worked after hours on his own time—an unpaid freebee for the boss. Of course, you know that the boss liked that very much.

Very much, indeed.

With that kind of generosity, the boss had plans to take care of Donnie by making sure that he received an

excellent retirement package.

But on the day that tragedy struck, Donald P.'s smile faltered a bit. Dropped.

Donald's wife had passed in the night without a warning sign. Sadly, there was really nothing that he could have done to prevent it. Death had reached into her chest, grabbed her heart, and squeezed the life out of it.

So, on that particular morning, he just simply woke up next to a corpse. Even if he had heard her gasping for breath, the ambulance wouldn't even have made the emergency call on time.

Poor old Donald managed to make it through two whole weeks of sadness before returning even an ounce of a smile. During the funeral service his kids embraced him. Tears came down like a summer storm in late July as it fell hard, trying to wash the grief away.

But still, it lingered.

At least, for a while.

In the gloom of his house, now alone, depression had decided to make a stop and rest. Both children were already moved out and married and the only company was the glow of the TV, the walls, and his memories that projected beneath his skull.

He thought of his wonderful children, his late wife, his friends, and the life he had here on planet Earth.

Looking over at the recliner where his wife had recently sat, she would crochet. As if her presence was still there, he could remember when she would sit and hum a song while she worked her needlepoint making extravagant articles of beauty. Humming along, passing the time, while enjoying her favorite hobby.

Sometimes, she would catch him looking at her and grin. He knew that she loved him. She knew that he



loved her.

Sitting there thinking about those memories, he wished that she could still be here with him, while she caught him sneaking glances at her. Really, and truly, wished.

He began to cry.

As the tears brought the July storm again, his mind began to alter into an idea. Something that would help his grieving heart immensely, because a special day was coming up.

Donald stood up, walked across to the kitchen, and opened the back door.

\* \* \*

The next day, Donald's daily schedule continued:

Up and out of the door by 7 am; driving to work while enjoying that fresh brewed cup of Joe; arriving and picking up his schedule for the day; climbing into the company truck; driving around picking up supplies and delivering them; then ending his final destination at home around 4 pm.

During that day he conversed with his co-workers with the return of his infamous smile, just like before, talking about sports:

"Did you hear about the hockey player that was suspended indefinitely?"

"Did you hear about the baseball player knocking it out of the stadium?"

"How about the soccer player that snapped his leg in three places?"

Still informative, and sometimes even talked fast. His friends at work were deeply admiring Donald. They still said that he should be a sports commentator or newscaster. Knew it in their hearts. Donald was one of a kind, and they felt remorse for him over the bad times that he was going through; and really hated to see something like that happen to someone such as nice and sincere.

But no one can live forever. When God calls for you, you go. Simple as that.

The special day came and Donald decided to have some company over including his co-workers and his kids and their spouses. Beaming with happiness, his door was open to all. Happy, because he wanted to let them know that he felt better now. Felt at ease. Happy that his wife was not in any pain anymore.

Nope, no suffering here.

Donald had ordered a buffet of food to share with everyone and was just happy that they showed up. A few people couldn't make it, and that was understandable.

Maybe next time.

Donald was smiley again and was just bursting to let them in on a little secret; a surprise that would make this party lively.

He couldn't even stand still, rocking back and forth on his heels. Tears even came to his eyes, but not sad ones. Nope. Happy ones.

After everyone ate, he led them all to the back bedroom. The door was shut. He turned, holding his finger to his lips, and silently mouthed the word, "Shhh!"

Cautiously, carefully, Donald twisted the door knob and let it swing open.

The room was filled with a strong aroma burning from three different candles. A desk, a computer, and a tall lamp sat in the room. On a king size bed laid the corpse of his dead wife. Her blonde head was turned toward them, mouth agape, with the lips formed into a smile where Donald had pressed a hook into each side of her mouth, connected fishing line to both, and stretched it up and around both of her ears. Her eyes lids were sliced off (Darn things just would not stay up), and her chest cavity was cut wide open, peeled back along the sides, and empty from donating her organs to science. Inside the red and moist flesh, sat a long sheet cake—chocolate, with chocolate icing, and his wife's favorite even though that it had calories out the wazoo - and twenty candles were lit; twenty years of their marriage, twenty years of love.

In letters written in red icing the cake read:

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY! LOVE YOU BUNCHES  
AND BUNCHES!  
TO: HONEYBUNCH  
FROM: POO BEAR

The kids and their spouses screamed.

The co-workers screamed.

Everyone else that was invited screamed.

Obviously, Donald did not, and stood there with his infamous grin and a tear in his eye.

Now, his life was complete once again.



# Vulnerable

by Joshua Scribner



**T**HE STRONGEST AND MOST CONFIDENT man Kelly had ever met woke her up with his whimpers. She rolled over, turned on the lamp and then gazed at his ashen face.

“What’s wrong, hon?” she asked.

“Bad dream,” Greg responded with a whisper. “I dreamt Mandy and Kala died.”

Mandy and Kala were their daughters. Mandy was at camp, and Kala, too young for camp, was at her grandma’s.

“You just miss them,” Kelly said.

He didn’t seem to respond. She didn’t know how to comfort him. She’d never really had to. She hugged him and found his body stiff and unresponsive. She moved back to her side of the bed.

“Did you pray? I mean, in your way, to your spirits.”

He nodded.

“Then why are you so upset? They always seem to give you what you want?”

He looked at her, still greatly aggrieved, but also disgusted.

“Sorry. That was a stupid thing to say. I guess if I just saw what you saw, I’d be devastated, even if I had the power to prevent it from really happening.”

“That’s not it. It’s just that when I woke up from the dream I sent my spirits to protect them.”

“Well, that’s good, isn’t it?”

“All my spirits.”

She tried to look concerned but doubted it worked. She’d never really believed the whole spirit thing. He’d achieved much success, and that was because of his confidence and skill.

She couldn’t stand seeing him this way. This wasn’t the man she had married. The man she had married would never wake up crying over a silly little night-

mare. She was a little relieved when the phone rang. She got up to answer it.

“No! Don’t!”

She pretended not to hear him as she rushed through the house. She wondered who could be calling at this hour and hoped they would require her attention for a while. She picked up the phone.

“Hello.”

“If you see us, you will die!”

“What?”

“We tricked him with the dream, and he’s left himself vulnerable.”

“Who is this?”

“His flesh and blood contain the magic that commands the spirits we fear. We want to drink his blood and eat his flesh.”

She pressed the button to hang up the phone, but that didn’t stop the voice from coming.

“Though they do not know it yet, the children also harbor magic. Tell them not to avenge.”

There was a crash at the back of the house and then her husband screamed like a child. That scream quickly trailed off into the distance.

She felt as if her heart dropped. “Please bring him back! I’ll do anything!”

“Tell the children what we said. Tell them if they don’t try to avenge we won’t come for their mother.”

There was now silence on the other side of the line. She dropped the phone and stood there in utter horror. There was absolutely nothing she could do right now. She was the only one in the family who couldn’t summons help.



# Scott Nicholson Interview

by Emmanuel Paige

Biographical introduction "Who Scott Thinks He Is" and promotional material all gratefully borrowed, with permission, from Scott Nicholson's Web site: [www.hauntedcomputer.com](http://www.hauntedcomputer.com)



## Who Scott Thinks He Is

**B**OONE, NC, AUTHOR SCOTT NICHOLSON has published novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction magazine articles, and has written five screenplays. As a newspaper reporter, he's won three North Carolina Press Association awards. He's had the usual collection of odd jobs: dishwasher, carpenter, painter, musician, baseball card dealer, and radio announcer. Now he haphazardly trades words for beans and uses "haphazardly" as often as possible.

Nicholson's first novel "The Red Church," inspired by legends surrounding a haunted Appalachian church near his home, was a Stoker Award finalist and an alternate selection of the Mystery Guild. "The Harvest" is an alien infection tale that's an allegory for the development of the mountains. "The Manor" is set at a haunted artists' retreat in the Appalachian Mountains and has been optioned for film development. "The Home" was inspired by the death of a child at a nearby group home for troubled children, informed by Nicholson's own forgettable childhood. "The Farm" is based on the little farm community where he moved in 2004 and became a serious organic gardener and libertarian. "They Hunger"--well, let's just say it contains three sex scenes, pseudo-vampires, and the phrase "You got a purty mouth."

Nicholson has published about 60 stories in six different countries, including the collection "Thank You For The Flowers." Nicholson won the grand prize in the international Writers of the Future contest in 1999. That same year, he was first runner-up for the Darrell Award. He studied Creative Writing at Appalachian State University and UNC-Chapel Hill. He recently

finished a term as Secretary for the southeastern chapter of the Mystery Writers of America and is vice-president of the Horror Writers Association and is a member of Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers...

Unfortunately, they never taught him to write: he had 105 rejections before his first story sale and over 400 before he sold a novel. He hasn't learned much from his mistakes but thinks he'll probably improve with practice. If nothing else, he's become a better liar.

Nicholson has published numerous articles on writing and his publishing experiences, and he operates a freelance editing business. His website [www.hauntedcomputer.com](http://www.hauntedcomputer.com) features author interviews, articles, and fiction excerpts. Bad relationship advice. Humor. Gardening tips. Subliminal tricks to sell his books. That sort of thing.

***Macabre Cadaver: What inspired you to start writing?***

**Scott Nicholson:** I used to make comic books as a kid, fold up the paper and make the panels and drawings. I was always creative and enjoyed that type of escape into my imagination. I guess I just never grew up.

***MC: How did you learn the craft of writing?***

**SN:** I'm still learning. This is a job that takes a lifetime commitment. There are some geniuses who get it right on the first try, but most of us mortals must plod along and go through growing pains. Reading and writing a lot is the only way to do it. You can't follow anyone else's path through the jungle. You have to hack out your own.

***MC: Do you write full-time? What is your writing schedule?***







egory at all. Categories are simply shorthand for books the publisher doesn't want to bother differentiating and promoting, which is most of them.

**MC:** *The science fiction categories seem to be expanding as horror is dwindling. Is this a sign of future publishing trends?*

**SN:** I haven't really noticed that myself, and writers seem to feel science fiction is actually shrinking, too. It's difficult to say, because most of that section in the store is taken up with Star Wars, Star Trek, or other franchise books. Serialization works much better there than in horror, because in horror it's difficult to sustain suspense over many books. We know the main character isn't going to die because then the series would stop, so there's not much you can do with it aside from the Kolchak or X-Files idea of supernatural investigation. I don't watch TV but the horror shows don't seem to last long, either.

**MC:** *Are vanity press and/or "Print on Demand" publishers viable options for new writers, or are they a sham? Is it better to submit to "traditional" publishers and go through the rejection/acceptance process, get an agent, etc., than to pay to have a book printed and/or published?*

**SN:** If you want to be serious and make a living, you need to try New York. If you self publish, there are just too many obstacles, the biggest one being that you may not be writing publishable work but don't know it yet. If you just want to stroke your ego and dump a book out there, it's easy, but it's also damaging the entire infrastructure and crappy books dumb down the public. However, if you are willing to create a cottage industry, or have a small and easily targeted audience, then it can make sense to self publish. But realize you'll have to do everything yourself, and be smart at business and promotion as well as editing, proofreading, graphic design, and distribution.

**MC:** *Are people buying and reading less books and hardcopy printed material now that the computer (with the Internet, blogs, video games, and other distractions) is a common household appliance?*

**SN:** I remember about a decade ago when everybody was saying e-books were going to change publishing. Agents and writers were fiercely protecting those rights. And they turned out to be worthless, in most cases. You can't even give those damned things away. Nobody's stealing e-files and chuckling at how

they pulled a fast one on the writer while they read 400 pages off a screen. The only e-books that got attention were back when the medium itself was news, such as King's "Riding The Bullet," or the ill-fated "The Plant," and Douglas Clegg's brilliant experiments. Maybe the technology will evolve, but it's hard to beat a book, and paper is still the only format that I'd trust in a time capsule.

**MC:** *Do you think electronic publishing will have the same effect on printed books and magazines as CD-ROMs had on cassette tapes, making them obsolete or antiquities?*

**SN:** It will keep evolving, and writers had better evolve with it. Videogames have replaced movies as the biggest moneymaker, and mass market paperbacks have plummeted in market share since the 1970s. Comic books are hot right now, though it may be that readers are lazy and can flip through one in five minutes. I do it myself, and they're easy and fun to read online as well. The cost of raw materials and shipping have a big impact on the book business, and maybe people will eventually be choosing free online entertainment over \$30 books. But printed books have outlasted every other form of recorded communication. The good news for writers is they will always have a job, but it might not be in writing novels.

**MC:** *Have you ever read fiction that is published online, or in ebook format? If so, did you like it, love it, or hate it?*

**SN:** This is interesting, but I think people have a definite idea of how much time they will spend on online content. YouTube videos that last over 10 minutes get far fewer views than those that are two or three minutes. People are choosy with their time, and rightfully so. I think it will actually cause written communication to evolve, as we've already seen with the advent of text messages. I've read a few things online and occasionally read advance works of my friends on the screen, but it's physically less comfortable than my usual reading spots of bed or bathtub. Of course, a laptop makes that process simpler, but it's harder on the eyes any way you look at it. In general, I'm willing to read an article or short-short online but I'm reluctant to read a novel or book or lengthy article.

**MC:** *Your latest book, "The Skull Ring", is available in a limited edition hardback. Can you give me a few details about this most recent book?*

**SN:** I work as a reporter so a lot of my day is spent at the keyboard. With a laptop, my schedule has evolved so that I write whenever I get 15 spare minutes. I used to write in the mornings and have a fixed routine, but as a parent that's not as workable anymore, so now I just make time where I can. My main goal in my writing is to someday work on it full time, but it's also something I can do in my old age to augment the Social Security. If fame and fortune arrive, that's groovy, but that's beyond my control so I don't worry about it. I am open to the universe and what it brings.

**MC:** *Which authors (past and present) are your favorite or have influenced you the most?*

**SN:** Influences are probably different than "favorites," because I saw definite mimicking of Kurt Vonnegut, Ernest Hemingway, Dr. Seuss, Richard Brautigan, and then later, Ray Bradbury, Stephen King, Elmore Leonard, and William Goldman. Just dump it all in the hopper and hopefully they all grind together into something approaching originality. If you write enough, you can't help sounding like your true self.

**MC:** *Why did you choose to write within the horror genre?*

**SN:** I think it chose me rather than the other way around. Early on, I read this creepy book called "The Sentinel" and then "The Exorcist," back when religious horror was cool, and so those influences stuck with me, along with Appalachian storytelling that drew on ghosts, witches, and weird creatures. So there was a mix of the primal and the philosophical that I can see in my work today, especially as I often explore mountain myths and faith issues.

**MC:** *Horror and terror produce such an exciting effect and sensation when they are executed properly in literature, but it is fiction and we know that the ghosts and bogeymen are not real. What about reality? What scares you in reality?*

**SN:** Bad things happening to good people. Unconscionable brutality and hate. Genocide. Bloody tribalism. Small-mindedness. Casual cruelty. In short, human nature scares me a lot more than nature, or supernatural, does.

**MC:** *Have you ever had an idea(s) that was too dreadful or horrible to even consider writing about?*

**SN:** Not really. There are some taboos around, like child abuse and underage sex and killing pets, but I've used those in stories, at least fleetingly. In the case of

"The Hounds of Love" that appears in my collection *Scattered Ashes*, I used all three. And "creepy pregnancy" is one of my subgenres. Basically it's in the treatment of the subject matter. I am not too interested in gore, though sometimes my work gets gruesome. But I hope my work always has a point, a thematic reason instead of simple prurience and vileness, because ultimately I want to deliver a positive message.

**MC:** *Do you think that horror is a true artistic form?*

**SN:** No. I think horror is a spice or element, a way of eliciting a response, and not the form itself. That's why horror has had such a terrible history as a fiction classification. It's simpler in movies--horror is a marketable genre with a reliable audience. That's not true in books, aside from the the small audience of collectors who trade limited editions. People who read Stephen King aren't buying pulp horror paperbacks, or there would be a lot of rich writers around.

One problem with categorization is that vampires or werewolves are considered "horror," yet most of the books containing them are actually romances, and those audiences don't really overlap. Romance novels make up over half the market while books with "horror" on the spine are as dead as the Western and Mack Bolan adventure books. Part of it is because women do most of the book buying, and the young male audience member with disposable income is likely sitting at a videogame system instead of reading a book. I believe publishers see this male reading audience is gone and extend it to "Horror is dead," dismissing horror as juvenile, slimy, and trashy.

**MC:** *I was at a bookstore recently and I noticed that the Horror genre/category section is diminishing and dwindling down to just a few books. Is the Horror genre dead or dying? Are "horror" writers now trying to publish primarily in the "mainstream" and eschewing the "H" word moniker?*

**SN:** If you're smart, you don't want "horror" anywhere on your book. I believe horror readers will find it anyway. Look at Scott Smith and "The Ruins," or Joe Hill's "Heart-Shaped Box." They weren't marketed as horror, though of course everyone soon knew Hill was Stephen King's son and made the inference. But writers never have a say in the marketing, anyway. That's all publisher perception, and the more you get paid, the less likely they will want to publish you in any cat-



**SN:** It's a Satanic cult book from Full Moon Press, using the "false memory" phenomena, with a whacked-up therapist messing with the patient's head. It was originally a secular novel, but I revised it and explored questions of faith, though it's certainly not a "God versus Devil" book. It's basically a suspense thriller but has some creeps to it, and you're never sure whether the devil is actually onstage or not. I think Satanism is making a comeback, because there's more of a sense of 'evil' in the world. Everybody's on edge, wired, depressed, fearful. It's affecting us on a quantum and physiological level.

**MC:** *You have published seven books, five screenplays, hundreds of short stories and articles, are you planning on retiring any time soon?*

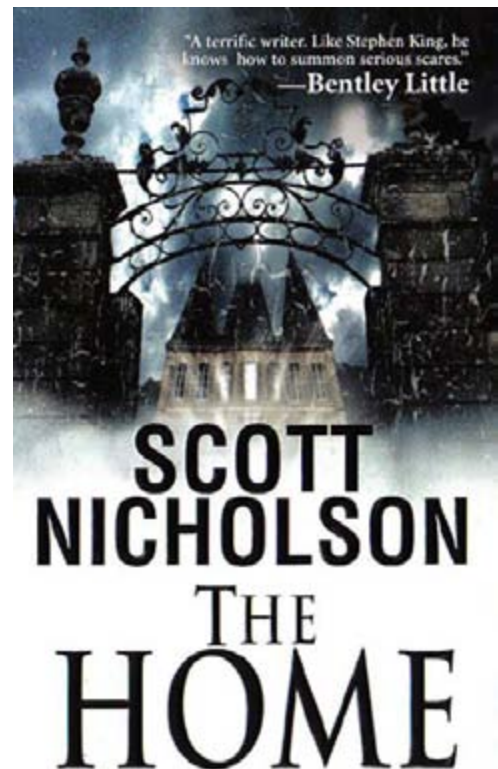
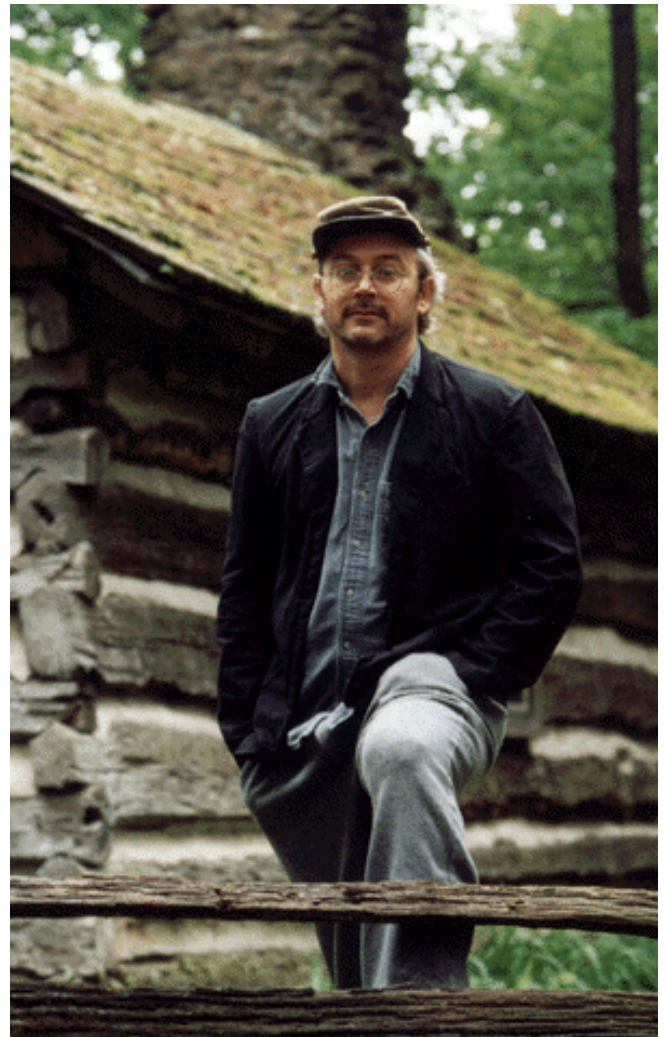
**SN:** Well, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't write. I also play music and I'd like to paint in my old age, but for my spiritual growth and God-granted talents, writing is the best purpose here for me besides spreading some love and joy. If I found a better purpose, I'd give it a try, but I also like to work alone and basically I'm a dreamer. I want to work in dirty sweat pants, torn T-shirts, and flip flops.

**MC:** *Do you have any advice or a few tips for aspiring writers?*

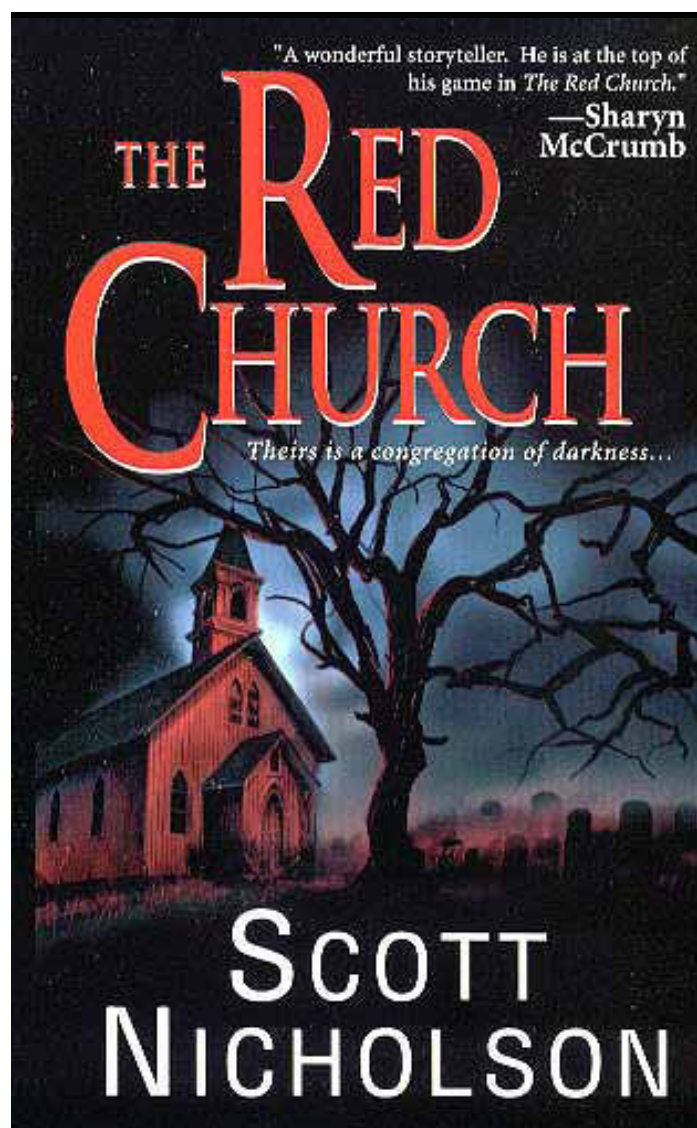
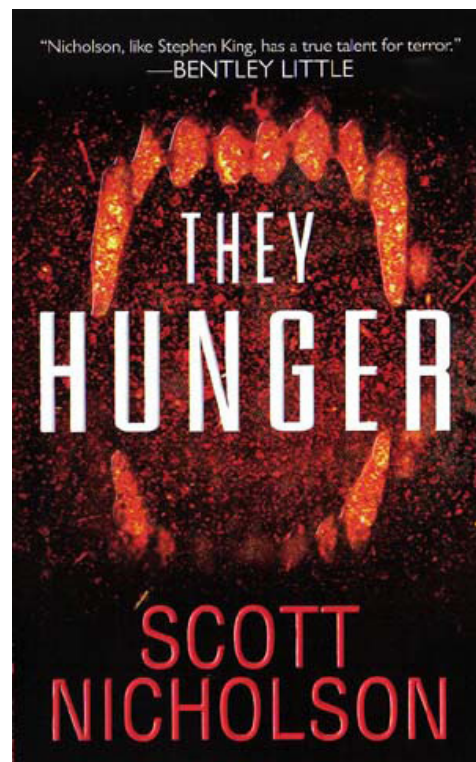
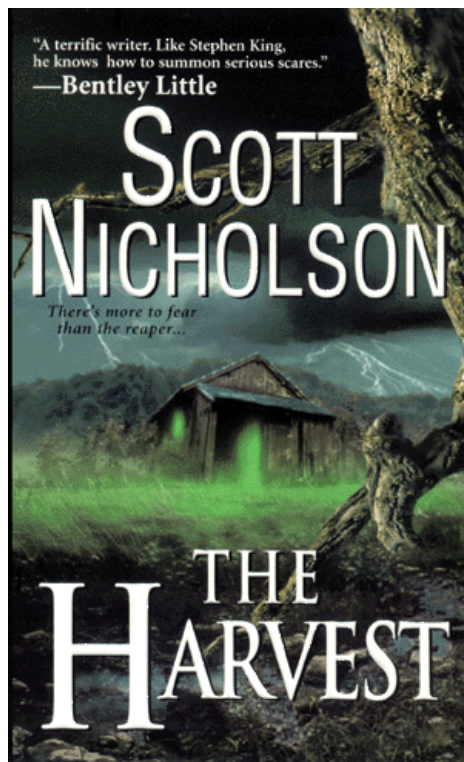
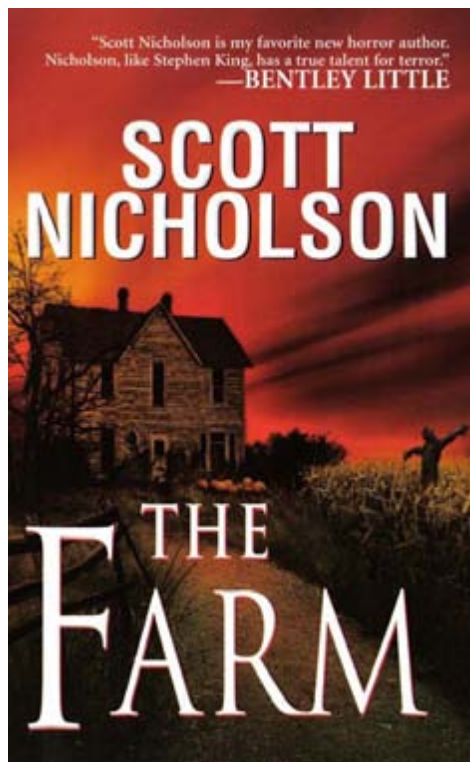
**SN:** Write. Throw most of it out and revise it. Get some rejections. Write until you reach the end and then stop. Then write some more. It's that simple.

### Editorial Note:

Scott's latest novel, "The Skull Ring", will be available in a signed/limited edition from Full Moon Press (visit [www.hauntedcomputer.com](http://www.hauntedcomputer.com) for more details), and he told me that he has submitted it for publication in paperback, but he doesn't know if or when it will come out. I am finishing up his novel "The Farm" and I am enjoying it immensely. Scott is an excellent writer and a nice guy on top of that, so any of his books are, in my humble opinion, worth reading. He writes quality books, the kind that are becoming a rarity in the massive onslaught and proliferation of poorly written books on the market. He gets two thumbs up from Macabre Cadaver. In the lingo of the Internet age: "WTG Scott!" Keep up the good work.









# The Bitter Truth

## Writing: The Journey

by J.R. Care



### INTRODUCTION

“Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else. “

—Gloria Steinem—

**W**RITING AS A JOURNEY, the metaphor has been used over and over like that graduation speech about “bricks and foundation to your education...”

But the truth is, it works. Why change something that works? It not only works but it's the best analogy there is for the subject so we're going to keep it. Writing is a journey...

If you were to begin a book right now then in six months from now you would still be writing the book and maybe even in a year from now. Once you write that first chapter or the prologue you have set the wheels in motion to begin a long and trying journey. But like any journey you want to be prepared; you want to make sure you have all the essentials packed up in suitcases or boxes or whatever you use to pack up your belongings.

For my family, we usually go on camping trips at least twice each summer. We always have these two large plastic crates that contain cooking utensils, beach towels and one box is dedicated completely to snacks... We go prepared!

Like any journey, you don't leave home unprepared. If you're going a long trip you usually want to bring along a map (there's no GPS, Tom-Tom for writing, sorry) and you want all the necessities you may need on your trip.

So let's pretend for a moment that we are about to

take that long journey of writing a novel. Chapter by chapter, mile-by-mile, we need to be totally prepared. Let's start packing the essentials. Before you can actually leave home you need all the essentials...

—The Essentials—

\*The Handy-Dandy Writer's Notebook: This is the pocket-sized notebook that all writers should carry with them at all times! If you think of an idea in the middle of work or while shopping just pull out the handy-dandy notebook and jot down the thought.

\*Index Cards: Get a pack of these at the local dollar store. They are great for storyboarding, character sketches, scene outlining and much more! They can also be easily taken almost anywhere.

First thing we are going to need is where we are going and how we plan to get there. In this step of preparation for the journey you need to know what it is your about to begin writing. You may have looked back through your handy-dandy notebook and the idea of where your going came to you.

Wherever the idea came from, let's just assume you have the basic idea. You're writing a story about (insert a brief synopsis of your story) but you're still unclear how to get from Point A to Point B to Point C.

So you need a map. You need to know which direction to head and which route is the quickest. As we all know, the quickest way from Point A to Point B is a straight line. But in fiction writing you sometimes have to take detours and enjoy the sights along the way. For simplicity sake's though we're going to find our map and the quickest way from A to B.

Make an outline. It's not difficult, it doesn't require a whole lot of time and it will help you more than hinder you. An outline is not restrictive meaning you do not necessarily have to follow it point-by-point. In fact, you probably won't follow it point-by-point because an initial outline will not incorporate the story as a whole and thus detours will pop up along the way.

An outline is one of the very first things you should do for any story, at least after you have brainstormed and decided on what it is you are going to write about. Repetition is the best way learn something so let me repeat: An outline is one of the very first things you should do for any story. Read that line again if you need to and then come back to me when you have it instilled in your mind permanently.

Outlines are the map for your long journey. Why would you want to trek off on a long journey into the great unknown without a map? It's foolish. Yes, some people will argue that you don't need an outline and you can wing it but most likely you'll get completely lost, turned around and end up in a dead-end or go miles and miles without any real meaning. True, some people can do it with ease but I can't and I won't even discuss how to be a Non-Outline writer.

Take your basic idea and begin outlining the first few scenes in your book. The outline can be simple as one-liners or as detailed as in paragraphs. I usually begin an outline with one-liners then go back and develop the key points more thoroughly. Here's an example:

## One-Liner Outline:

- Joe is sitting in his office, feet propped on the table.
- He is staring blankly up at the ceiling fan turning counter-clockwise.
- Suddenly the door burst open and a lady enters.
- Joe quickly assumes a professional posture in his chair
- The lady begins telling him about her problems.

## Detailed Paragraphed Outline:

Joe is sitting at his desk with his feet propped up on the desk's wood surface. The walls are a dark brown-

ish-red with no windows in the office. There is a ceiling fan slowly turning clockwise and making an annoying creaking noise. The man is idly staring off into space and has tuned out the annoying creaking noise.. He's been wondering if anyone was going to show up today requesting his help to solve a mystery. Joe begins to worry that no one was going to show up and thinks back to his last job two weeks earlier. His office door flings open and a lady in a black dress comes strolling in. She is a 30-something petite brunette. Joe drops his legs to the floor, scoots his chair up to the desk and begins to listen to the woman as she tells him her problems. Her husband is missing. She received a strange phone call. A package came in the mail but she has not opened it. She presents the package to Joe.

The first example is done in very brief one-liners that act as cues to remind the writer what is going on in the scene. These types of outlines work well for outlining individual chapters, just sketching out very basic flow of what happens next. It would be difficult to write an entire book's outline in such a way because you would probably end up with several pages of one-liners. However doing several chapters at a time like this will help you go from point-A to Point-B to Point-C very smoothly. You fill in the gaps between the one-liners with narratives, descriptions, dialog or whatever else you feel needs to be included between the points.

In the second example, using paragraphed form, the details are sketched out more clearly in almost narrative style yet these details need to be elaborated a lot more when writing the actual scene. Writing a entire book's outline like this could also prove to be tiring and tedious but no one ever said writing a book is easy work! Some authors write outlines like this that add up to 100+ pages before they even start the first page of the book.

So how do you go about writing an outline for the entire work? It is almost impossible to outline an entire book even if you know the entire story because as I've mentioned, there are detours that will pop up while you are writing. Usually these detours can show even the author surprises and sights he never would have imagined in the initial outline.

Usually I outline a few chapters at a time. I start a book by outlining the first 3-5 chapters which will establish the main character and some gripping action or

drama to hook the reader. The first five pages need to be intensely alluring so starting with action is always a good idea. If you write an outline for the first few chapters I recommend doing it on index cards. Write several scenes on the cards then shuffle them up. Sometimes you may find it better to start the story on a later scene than what you originally thought.

There is also the Rule of Three. Almost everything adheres to this rule; Three wishes from a genie, three beans to grow a beanstalk, three bears in Goldilocks, three little piggies, you're born, you live, you die... you get the picture.

Stories can be broken into the rule of three as well. Beginnings. Middles. Endings.

The Beginning opens up the story, introduces the reader to the setting, the characters and what the conflict is going to be.

The Middle focuses on the greater portion of the story, the actual conflict and how the characters interact with the setting to resolve the conflict.

The Ending resolves the conflict and gives the final resolution to all the loose ends.

When writing an outline you can break the story into these three parts. Write an outline for the beginning, the middle and the ending.

Two things need to be known: You need a solid beginning and a solid ending. Knowing where the story starts and where it ends is very important. What comes in the middle needs to connect to the beginning and the ending smoothly and concisely.

Unlike scholarly outlines, you need not be so formal in your outlines. Anyone who took a speech class probably remembers having to learn the precise format to an outline. In fiction writing the writer has complete and absolute creative freedom to do an outline however he sees fit. The outline just needs to be organized as possible and it needs to serve its purpose as a map for the journey.

You may discover your own style for writing outlines and if it works for you then use it. Try writing a story without an outline then try to write a story using an outline. Which one of the stories developed easier?

I would also like to mention the Headlight system for plotting. This combines both Outlining and Non-Outlining. You write as if you were driving at night with the headlights on. You can only see a few scenes or pages ahead of you at any given time. In this man-

ner, you don't write out extensive outlines, you only write outlines for what you know comes next. After you finish that you write an outline for what comes after that.

#### —A Note on Characters—

I won't go into details here about Characters in fiction because I have an entire article on the topic of character creation however I will mention a few important elements:

Plot requires characters to make the wheels keep turning. Having believable characters is essential for a good story. In my opinion, every character no matter how small needs a backstory even if the backstory doesn't even come up in the story. The author should know each character inside and out. You are the All Mighty Creator of your characters so take advantage of the power and be all-knowing! This is your chance to play God!

Here are a few pointers for characters

1. It is wise to have characters created before developing a plot. Characters cannot be plopped willy-nilly into a plot and expected to act right on the spot.

2. Characters need to be well-fleshed out before the writing process even begins.

3. Try to avoid making "disposable characters" or characters you create just to kill off. Even if you do plan to kill off half the cast, write all characters with the same detail and effort. Otherwise if you create such a character that is just there for the slaughter you run the risk of creating a "flat" character that when he does die nobody even cares.

4. Trying giving each character a different speech pattern, unique fashion sense, an original psyche and various quirks, flaws and personality issues. The flaws do not need to be extreme but can be very simple as a tendency to stutter, to use certain words/phrases quite often etc.

5. Use detailed character sheets/character profiles. These can be found easily online. They detail characteristics like Age, Sex, Race, History, Appearance, Likes/Dislikes, Family etc

6. If you can't get the feel of a character do some free-style writing in a new document. Use stream-of-consciousness to get the character's thoughts on the

page. Throw them into a random scene and see how they act. Have them write a journal entry or write a letter to you. Do a Q&A interview with the character. Play the role of Freud and psychoanalyze your character all the way back to their childhood.

These are only a few tips for getting the characters out of your head and onto the page.

But your journey is still far from over. You have a long ways to go and some of the things you need to know for survival can only be self-taught. Each person is different and thus each person learns through his own trials and errors. Do not give up! Do not turn around but instead keep on marching! The only way to truly learn to write is to write. Do not worry about whether what you are writing is “good” or not because that will only hinder your journey.

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# POETRY



## **Beyond the Average** by Felino Soriano

Serene the moment of day awakening  
to sun unzipping night's charcoal  
fleece, the thick rendition of opaque  
vellum, useable article of stretched visual  
articulation. Moments run across horizontal  
art forms, tangible hangings relating to distanced  
mountains, downscaled homes exiled by feathered  
shadows, contoured turmoil. Emerging through  
distance a face, a dawn, a memory entering the eye  
with static, filling the mind with  
copasetic par with anything afterward  
a rain's many languages.

## **Trapped Fortune** by Felino Soriano

First take of touching light  
down on untouched ground  
mazes for the unsleeping crawling,  
myriad creatures creating paths within  
the silent unseen. Illumination uncovers  
nothing. The pulling back with slanting glow  
fingers across day's directional names  
shows position of east west famous fortunetellers'  
incorrect weather patterns. Deep  
emotions hide coherently,  
the still held as if gripped motionless  
to reveal what the human forsakes traveling  
atop the spider's undulating contoured  
back.

## **Languor** by Felino Soriano

The afternoon showed laziness, humanness.  
Light stretched elongated wrapping  
ankles wrists around the vertical patterned gnarls  
of oaks whose majesty maintained their  
pierce through sleeping fog, a crowning  
posit of angular stillness. Wind sans  
howl spoke vernacular amid cracking  
leaves, the bug homes, the branches' lovers,  
the epitome of falling's cliché. The serenade  
of movement though mostly silent  
spoke a jazz of azure, of stacked blankets  
covering moments of motionlessness  
symbolizing illumination of indolence.



# **“Secret Name, Sacred Angles, Signed in Blood”**

**by LeRoy James McKittrick**

You shall address me as Nahab.  
My earthly moniker is needed  
only in faded pages of history,  
crumbling to forgetfulness  
lost amongst the languid waves of memory.  
Two centuries have blinked by  
in my fevered search  
for greater understanding.  
The souls of Arkham's young  
burnt away to bolster  
my continuing existence.  
The gentle flames of life  
sacrificed to the bonfire  
of my growing power,  
tainted life, age denied.

Arkham,  
mouldering town of yore,  
bedrocked in misery's wondrous horror.  
Slightly twisted ones  
flock here, drawn by shadowy knowledge  
and macabre memories to be absorbed, relived.  
Masses of humanity, most worthless  
in their selfish insect scrabbling.  
A few brighter minds,  
sparking almost alien intellectual  
worthy of attention from my master,  
glorious, primal evil,  
the grandest Sultan of demonic realms.

These rarest few  
I gather to my withered bosom,  
coaxing, guiding, tantalizing  
with tempting images of esoteric formulae,  
(doorways past the mundane)  
elder magicks founded in truth.  
Sacred lines and etheric angles  
bathed in sweetest violet light.  
Notations in tomes inked in blood,

ancient rituals validated  
by the discoveries of man.  
Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics  
providing proof of unknown planes  
of existence, waiting to be crossed  
in the journey to my master's throne.  
There, the chosen ones collected  
will bathe in alien-rhythmed chanting.  
Tossing away earthly chains and sanity  
for the chance to sign Azathoth's register of chaos.  
Demonic quill dipped in sanguine ink.  
Their signature a guarantee,  
I will continue...



## **Flowery Verse**

**by Paul Handley**

Horticulture hurricane is the horror of pretty.  
Uprooted flowers plead mercy for their orphaned state.  
The petals churn like propellers  
Catching a small waft of uplift, they batter the window.  
Petals are the fair leaves.  
The stems are a green that is still ripening, rank immaturity  
reaching and grabbing, using flowers as camouflage for  
their deeds, that when yanked is not a clean snap, but stub-  
born tendons shredding until severed, leaving bright flecks  
stamped against the window by gummy rain and stamen  
leak, like puke or multimedia gone wrong.  
Vines have replaced bars, I have to kick the door open to  
snap them  
They fray and then solder back together while slashing  
another.  
Petals leaned and brushed his/her ear, whisper like a hand-  
some beau, this is what happens when you squeeze me. I  
erupt my beauty on you til my insides are bared

---

# Before Darkness/ A Trilogy

by Sergio Ortiz

## *Above*

We decided to hunt for butterflies  
on the other side of the fence,  
between old statues of father,  
in overgrown grass,  
the place he keeps his untamed calf.

Rolling towards the pit,  
(where civets harvest musk,  
and the sky gives way to night)  
was father's code to play,  
the list of sanctions  
too long for me to write.

We put our catch in glass jars.  
Pushed, touched, and joked  
in such a way as not to break  
my father's code. But in the end  
you kissed another man.

## *Below*

They rested on the shoulders  
of statues. He said they perfumed  
summer with a kind of musk.

We took the beautiful ones  
out of the jar, pierced with a pin  
and let them dry. The ministry

of their wings kept us awake.  
We disappeared to the other side  
of the fence where father

kept the untamed calf. He unbuttoned  
my pants. I didn't care, father had been dead  
for years, dead and all I wanted  
was another kiss.

## *Between*

Father's code was the magnet:  
his classical order, control, synthesis, rules.

I was ten and a half  
on the day of the magnet,  
his untamed calf.  
He was half a year older  
and never quite faithful.

Aunt Enriqueta would read us  
stories of houses that made noises,  
--padam padam padam--  
dogs' eyeballs slit  
with half  
a razor.  
It was rainbows on butterfly wings,  
and the scent of musk  
we found in a kiss,

I do believe in you and you in me.  
We've been together for half a century.  
Now, give this old man one last kiss.

Half a statue, was what was left.  
Half a pasture, half a fence.

# Breathing Beyond Air

by Sergio Ortiz

Once again, death was here to visit.  
His hand ready to edit the tears  
of what I have lost between the lines  
of my last canto.

Death, where did you hide the voice  
that hardens my nipples?  
You stripped to show me the virility  
with which you hope to rip out my sun's  
fire, humiliated by the outline of a vein.

My tree is ready for its new growth,  
yet I want no limits to your touch.  
Death, I know you want me to return  
the visit, but I do not sleep well in arms  
of the vanishing voiceless twilight.

---

# Intimate

by Sergio Ortiz

In the light of spontaneous  
unforeseen encounters  
an intimate lethargy navigates  
the breezes where my fears  
have chosen to sleep.

You saddle the other me,  
the one you empty  
each disappearing dawn,  
the bulldogger with a bitten lip.

I am crowned with petals,  
dreams beyond dreams.  
I learn to forget by forgetting.

There is nothing left of my ecstasies,  
or the color of my obsessions,  
not even the seize of your mouth  
on my words.

**Bio:** *Sergio Ortiz grew up in Chicago, studied English literature at Inter-American University in San German, Puerto Rico, and philosophy at World University. He was an ESL teacher most of his life but also worked with the elderly blind population as a Daily Living Skills Instructor for the El Paso Lighthouse for the Blind, and the Texas Lions Camp. He studied culinary art at The Restaurant School in Philadelphia and became a chef. His work has been published in Origami Condom, Poets Ink Review, POUI The Cave, Flutter, Silenced Press, Cause & Effect, The Cherry Blossom Review, Kritya, Ink Sweat & Tears, Ascent Aspirations, Cause & Effect, and The Battered Suitcase. He is pending publication in "Children, Churches and Daddies," "Cause & Effect," "Calliope Nerve," "Burst," "The Houston Literary Review," "Deep South, New Zealand," "Ranfurly, UK," "LUNAROSITY," "shaking like a mountain," "Iddie," "The Linnet's Wings," "Coming Together: At Last," Anthology, "Quill & Parchment," and "Neon Magazine."*



# End Song

by Donna Taylor Burgess

The screen door bangs in the breeze  
Creates a backbeat of despair  
I sit in Gina's room  
Watching as the clouds make yellow moonglow  
paintspills  
And dusky shadows  
On grinning bears and dancing elephants  
On her pink-gray walls.

Everything is gray in the end.

That moonglow makes even the brightest colors appear  
dead.

Gina is gray, too,  
Skin and eyes and nails  
Even rosy lips and silken tongue.  
Down in the cellar  
Pretty little fingers scraping on the stony floor  
And walls

Pads ground all the way to bone  
She mewls and calls for Mommy  
I sit in the chair where I used to hold her  
And rock until I doze into a dream of the Birthday Song  
Painted with colors other than gray.





---

# And Memories

## by David McLean

and memories are within the skull,  
not so much on the wetware there,  
as written into the bone by time's  
cunning finger that shall soon come  
to take us, far from this tactless babble  
to the sweet decorous silence  
of the tomb, the only noise there  
to disturb our noisome rest shall be  
the chewing jaws of the whorish  
worm.

a memory is written in  
meaningful meat, torn by the sins  
of living, but the meat is a worm's  
meaningless womb, death his  
living room

# Mining Abandoned

## Meanings

## by David McLean

nothing lies on the morning's light-stained plate  
and spatters our eyes with its tortuous abandoned  
abortion, all the meanings that ever deserted words  
and left the gods as these desolate orphans

we are, emptiness forgotten in our convivial hell,  
where we long to slaughter our brothers and  
sisters, the missing kisses of our desert nurture  
where the winds that brushed our young limbs

burned their tender torment when life is death already.  
heaven is whores' heroin and religion is crank for  
cretins  
and other derivative Christians, love but a bucket  
of blood, and the scars on our faces

are the tracks of neglected addictions, the needle in  
the neck  
and children's feckless dismemberment of memory,  
happier by far

swallowing a bottle of the forgetting, for only the  
blood's  
rush is heaven for us, hell's patronizing retention -

the slow drum that sings the cradle in the rushes  
and hands us the fingers that touch. and the dead  
stand,  
resolute and reticent, brave in their graves, and lie  
about resurrection, God's vague intention we dreamed  
once;

though we know so well today that only meat's decay  
ever waited for anyone, the knives and guns we love,  
like death's promise is fucking enough for love, hell  
below us,  
hell above, and love the weakest of any drug ...

and yet enough, the sedge that withers beneath us,  
and the vulture that sings of letters postmarked no-  
where,  
meaning and meaning's oblivion, Being being obli-  
on's  
menacing meaning, i choose to call them "poems"

almost alone, the truths we have known, faceless  
places, and the whores we've grown, the grave  
that feeds the cold meat and me still greedy  
for the bleeding, a book for devils to read,  
the madness of love's bad seed

# Sheath

## by David McLean

we scabbard loves  
in blood and suffering  
and instants we incarnate  
roseate as pain,

mourning we fall,  
lawless before us,  
like a meaty sword,  
when love panders to the sun,

and his sexy resurrection  
that wakes day shaky  
to gallivanting grief,  
wreaking her orgasms

like nothing upon us.  
for day is dawning boredom  
macabre we never loved, luscious  
and brief as a good hard fuck,

the scabbard and the whorish  
sword leaking meaning,  
a seed that angels linger long  
to suck,

a deliquescent death  
even this tiniest torture,  
comes this thus and dreams us  
unstuck

## Ghoulish Attitudes

by David McLean

the ghouls would prefer ring-pulls  
on coffin lids, like sardine tins  
they said,

and they didn't like cremation,  
it was disrespectful to the dead,  
or something

**Bio:** *"David McLean is Welsh though he has lived, rather reluctantly, in Sweden since 1987. So he knows what it's like to be dead. He has a couple of chapbooks out, one a free download at [Whyvandalism.com](http://Whyvandalism.com). The other, in print, can be ordered at <http://www.erbaccepress.com/davidmclean/4527659941>. He has a full length poetry collection available at Whistling Shade Press called *Cadaver's dance*. It can be ordered on [alibris.com](http://alibris.com) or on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). A second book of 128 pp is coming from Erbacce-press in August, "pushing lemmings." There is a self-published book of 109 pages at Lulu called "eating your night" - <http://www.lulu.com/content/2756039>. There are round 600 poems now in, or forthcoming, in just over 250 magazines online and/or in print. Details are at his blog at <http://mourning-abortion.blogspot.com>."*



## Alms for the Haunted

by Thomas Zimmerman

Gimme a skull, or a skull ring;  
real evil, or just a bad thing.

Gimme a ghoul, or a used hearse;  
genocide, nightmare—whichever's worse.

Gimme a demon, or a small fear;  
a cold corpse, a sweet regret, to hold dear.

Gimme a zombie, or a tarot card;  
a shrunken head, or a bible charred.

Gimme a vampire, or an ex-spouse;  
a garlic wreath, or rats to plague a charnel house.

Gimme a werewolf, or a blood-red moon;  
a festered wound, a harpy lover ready to swoon.

Gimme a succubus, or a curse to trust;  
a Poe bust, angel dust, your own haunted wanderlust.



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# The Magician

by Thomas Zimmerman

I reach my hand, conjurer  
that I am,  
straight through the wall between  
us.

It's you  
who does it, brings out this  
magic  
in me.

Forbidden girlfriend,  
oh the tricks  
I could do  
for you:

quicksand, guillotine,  
red ants and honey,  
saw you  
in half, skin you alive,

laugh at your funny  
bones.  
Hexed, possessed,  
lusty as a ram,

I,  
with cape, top hat, wand,  
and cute bunny I pull  
by the ears,

am waiting here  
for you.

# The Old Amusement Park

by Thomas Zimmerman

The old amusement park, now dark, transforms  
its whirligig to blood-smeared Catherine Wheel,  
its painted sunny scenery to storms,  
its trickster's handkerchief to moray eel,

its ticket booths to iron maidens filled  
with martyred saints. Its big top's slimed, and reeks  
and farts like Lovecraft's Ancient One, who's willed  
the world to death in tiger dung. Its freaks,

unleashed, now run amok. The snow cone's sweet  
with human blood; the cotton candy's pink  
is fiberglass. The clowns of hell will greet  
the rollercoaster's souls at Styx's brink.

The old amusement park, its tourist bus,  
its dark, in dreams scream deep in all of us.









# Featured Cover Artist

Adam Gillespie

Beat Kids Gallery  
[www.beatkidsgallery.webs.com](http://www.beatkidsgallery.webs.com)



**A**dam Gillespie is a macabre/contemporary artist who lives in central Canada. He contacted me about showcasing some of his artwork on Macabre Cadaver and when I visited his website ([www.beatkidsgallery.webs.com](http://www.beatkidsgallery.webs.com)) I knew that I wanted to use one of his pieces for the cover and to place him as this month's featured artist. This is just a sampling of Adam's artwork and you can find more on his website. His artwork is very nice and fits right into what Macabre Cadaver magazine is all about. I hope to see more of his work in the future. Thank you so much, Adam, for your generosity and donations to this issue. I couldn't have done it without you. The cover image is awesome.

Here is the "about" info from Adam's website:

I am re-creating the world how I see it. Without make-up, unpolished and raw. I'm showing people what they really are, and I want you all to be a part of it.

So join me.

ADAM.Past few weeks..  
Thursday, Aug 7, 2008

I have been working a lot on new projects, possible collaborations with other artists & portfolio additions.

I believe I have reached a point where I have totally outgrown most of the people around me, its strange. I am ready to move on & in fact I am looking forward to it intensely...

Change is crucial! Without it one would never grow, and I find it strange that many people seem to avoid it.

Well that is their decision I guess and I don't want to go out of my way to help those people who don't want it.

I have become a hermit in the past few months..but I work nonstop. My art is first, people are second. This city has me in the shits, there is nothing here for me. People generally say that because they're just fucking lazy and are looking for excuses, but for me that clearly isn't that case considering from the moment I wake if I am not drawing, painting, networking or advertising I am thinking of different ways to do so.







# Signature Ink Drawings

by Paulina Chu



**P**aulina was so kind as to offer some of her artwork for display here on Macabre Cadaver after she saw my pathetic pleas for artwork on deviantART forums. She was the only one to respond (free is not a word that professional artists and writers like to hear, and rightly so). This is just a sample of some of her artwork. You can view more at her website: [www.sweetappletea.com](http://www.sweetappletea.com). Thank you very much for your generosity, Paulina.

Here is the "about the artist" info from her website:

Hi! My name is PChu and I am an undergraduate student majoring in Psychology. I plan on attending medical school and hope to become a psychiatrist specializing on the treatment of military veterans. Art is just a lifelong hobby, so I'm not trying to powersell my stuff. The store is only up in case you want something like gift wise (posters, calendars, etc). It's all for fun.



My favorite color is purple and my favorite animal is a hippo. Therefore purple hippos rock my world.

I love video games, mainly Final Fantasy, Animal Crossing, Battlefront and all sorts of RPGs.

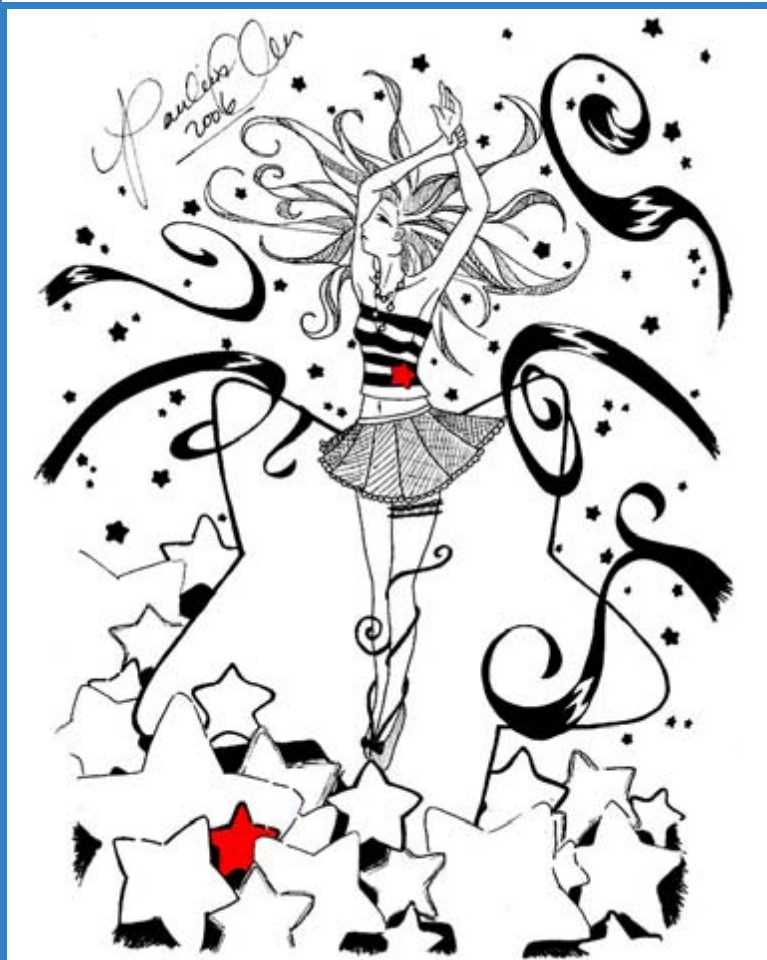
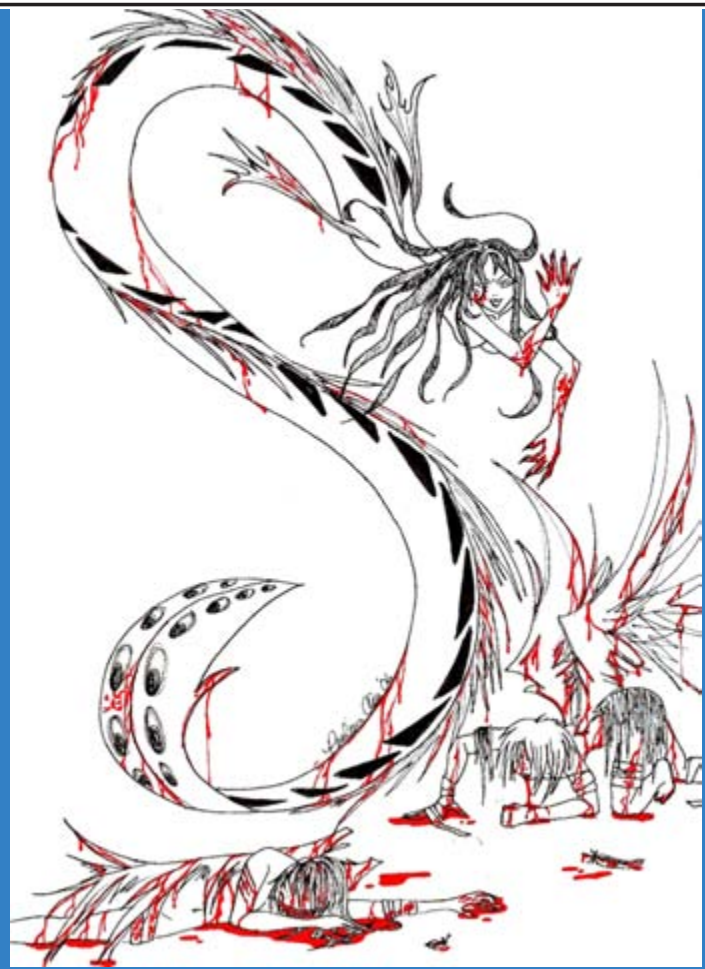
Fashion is a must.

Pikachu is my favorite pokemon. No competition.

Colorguard is a lifestyle. My lifestyle. I love spinning.

I support the military. I have many friends in the marines and I love them all. If you won't stand behind our troops, you're welcome to stand in front of them.









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The Editor, Emmanuel Paige

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